

puppet loosely strung

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/25907995) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/25907995>.

Rating:	Mature
Archive Warning:	Graphic Depictions Of Violence
Categories:	M/M , Multi
Fandom:	Hannibal (TV)
Relationships:	Will Graham/Hannibal Lecter , Will Graham & Abigail Hobbs & Hannibal Lecter , Will Graham & Beverly Katz , Alana Bloom/Beverly Katz
Characters:	Will Graham , Hannibal Lecter , Abigail Hobbs , Jack Crawford , Beverly Katz , Jimmy Price , Brian Zeller , Alana Bloom , Elliot Buddish , Chiyoh (Hannibal) , Dr. Frederick Chilton , Abel Gideon , Anthony Dimmond
Additional Tags:	Alternate Universe - Canon Divergence , Dark Will Graham , Serial Killer Will Graham , Mind Games , Manipulation , Murder , Cannibalism , Faked Symptoms of Illness , Pining , Getting Together , Murder Family , POV Multiple , Canon-Typical Violence , Canon-Typical Behavior , Faked Abduction , Referenced Childhood Trauma , Stabbing , References to Canon , happy ending-ish
Language:	English
Collections:	Villainous Big Bang 2020
Stats:	Published: 2020-08-15 Completed: 2020-09-15 Words: 26,239 Chapters: 6/6

puppet loosely strung

by [wishb0ne](#)

Summary

Will Graham has long since had his becoming when he meets Hannibal Lecter, and immediately knows what he is when he has his first meal from him. A long game follows, with the purpose of making Hannibal think he's innocent and sick until he wants the penny to drop.

Notes

here's my work for the villainous big bang! it's not finished yet but i'm, uh, working on it. still not sure on the amount of chapters, but i decided five would be my go-to.

enjoy!

Chapter 1

Will Graham tries his best to remain unseen and unnoticed.

The missing persons cases in the United States are *huge*; no one will notice a pattern unless they want to see a pattern. He kills people— adults, never children, they don't yield much meat (plus, it just feels *wrong*)— men and women of various ages and races. And he kills them from neighboring states, or sometimes a bit further away than that; Maryland, Tennessee, Kentucky— sometimes he goes for his home state of Louisiana, sometimes he goes as far as Pennsylvania.

Matter of fact, no one notices a pattern. Perhaps because he's not bold, because he doesn't leave the bones scattered around, waiting to be found. He uses the bones in whatever is useful to him, or simply destroys them through any means possible. The meat he doesn't like he cooks for his dogs; sometimes he wishes he was a farmhand, just to have some pigs. He's accustomed his dogs to the taste of human, but pigs would've been far easier to accommodate. Just throw it to their den and they eat it. Dogs are a bit pickier.

But he has seven dogs, and he lives in his cabin in the middle of nowhere. There's always fresh cuts of meat in his shed, which is well locked up. He remains unnoticed as a cannibalistic serial killer, but people turn and see him as the strange FBI professor, with weird ticks and neuroses, empathy and being on the spectrum. People think he's destined to kill, but no one knows he already has, and has done so plenty of times.

When he gets called back to the field by Agent Jack Crawford, he's not bothered. He has it all under control; he knows Jack trusts him far more than he should, considering. When he gets Dr. Hannibal Lecter on his tail, psychoanalyzing him, he *is* bothered. He gets ugly when he's psychoanalyzed — he's still a bit afraid that he will be *seen*, and that Dr. Hannibal Lecter will announce to the entire world that he is a killer. But Dr. Lecter gives him an off vibe too, so he doesn't mind too much.

(There is just something about him, the way he approaches the case and how he approaches him, tries to psychoanalyze him, questions him about his lack of eye contact. Many people have done that before, but Dr. Lecter's words are crafted methodically, like he is parading around trying to be what everyone else expects him to be like, like he is not normal and does it all just a little bit off — he gets it, he went through the same thing. He tells him his thoughts are often not tasty and he replies without a second's worth of doubt, *neither are mine*. He holds his gaze in such a way he seems petulant, interested in the way he thinks farther than most other psychiatrists have been in him.)

He thinks idly that he wouldn't be surprised if Hannibal has killed a man, too, and then he comes to him in the morning, saying the adventure is just theirs today, and shows him what he calls *a protein scramble*.

After eating almost exclusively human meat for the last few years, Will knows the taste. He knows it like the back of his hand. He takes the sausage in his fork and takes a bite, and he

immediately knows that Hannibal is feeding him a person. He wonders who it was— with his curiosity over the copycat killer, perhaps he killed Cassie Boyle. In the autopsy report, it was said her intestines were missing, and he knows that's logically the best thing to make into sausage.

So Hannibal is the copycat killer.

He hums. "This is very good," he says.

He can work through it, see what is the deal with this man; exactly what he has under his sleeve.

He's never met another killer face to face outside of cases. He's been awfully lonely, throughout all of his life, but even more so now that he's settled into murder and cannibalism and his dogs. He knows Hannibal must be equally as lonely, if not more, depending on how long he's been in this macabre business.

"I think Uncle Jack sees you as a fragile little teacup," Hannibal starts. "Fine China reserved only for special guests."

Will laughs at that, a belly laugh that goes through all of his body. He can't help but find the idea *ridiculous*. He takes another bite of the sausage, and tries his best to remain unseen and unnoticed, as he always has. "What do you see me as?"

Hannibal's eyes glint. "The mongoose I want under the house when the snakes slither by."

Oh, so he's a *pretentious* serial killer. Alright, then. He can work with that.

He doesn't miss the way Hannibal purposefully lets the files fall onto the ground. He's not stupid. He hurriedly apologizes and starts picking them up, wondering what he is doing there. Calling Hobbs, perhaps, letting him know that the FBI is on his tail. They'll get to a bloody scene there, at his home, he's sure of that.

And they do, indeed.

Will tries to help Hobbs' wife, but it's no use. He pushes the door open and aims his gun at him, his hands shaking convincingly.

"Garret Jacob Hobbs!" he exclaims. Hannibal's eyes are impassive, even as Hobbs' daughter has a dagger to her neck, ready to be killed. "FBI!"

Hobbs moves and he shoots him, too many times to count. He's not a fan of guns, so he does panic a little, although not as much as the impression he wants to give Hannibal does; he shoots Hobbs blindly, badly. He breathes hard, his stomach flipping upside down as Hobbs' daughter is on the floor, bleeding out.

"No, no, no, no..." he breathes. His daughter must've known, to some extent— she must've been aware. That doesn't mean she doesn't deserve to be saved.

Hannibal puts his hand around her neck, raises her head a little, and Will turns to look at Hobbs, blood spray all over his face.

"See?" Hobbs breathes, smiling weakly. "See?"

Oh, he sees. He has always seen.

Hannibal has to admit that he's not curious about Will from the get go.

He's a curious case, yes, with hyper-empathy and a cocktail of neuroses that make him such a great profiler. But there's nothing he can manipulate there, nothing he can really take advantage of. He still rolls with the punches, though; gives him Cassie Boyle's body in the field, gives him Cassie Boyle's intestines in his protein scramble.

It's not until they get to the Hobbs house that he truly feels inclined to take Will under his wing, mold him into something new.

The panic in Will's eyes as he shoots Hobbs, the way he looks at him as Hobbs asks him if he sees. If he understands the thrill behind the kill... that's what calls to him. The way Will's eyes widen as his face is splattered with blood, as it takes hold of him. *It feels good*, he can hear him think, his brain tinkering as he tries to come to terms with the fact he killed a man and that he liked it.

Hannibal helps Abigail Hobbs stay alive until the ambulance gets there, joins them in the cramped space of it. He thinks about Will's shaking hands, the way he kept whispering, pleading for Abigail not to die, simply by virtue of seeing her be a victim. (A victim that most definitely is more than a victim, but that is something for later.)

He can make Will realize what's building inside him. He's been able to do that to other patients before, showed them the darkness that they need to get out in the world. The times where he's been able to make contact after they end their time with him are very few, but he knows there must be a few killers around that have taken flight because of his influence.

Will can be a new one; Will can be a new personal project. A new puppet to play with to his liking. He surely fits the profile of what he likes in one of those, his strings loosely tucked into his palm.

Therapy with Will is, as he finds, a curious thing — he constantly switches between if killing Hobbs felt good or not, and he is attached to Abigail Hobbs simply by virtue of her existing and almost dying there, at the scene of the crime. He's also squarely in denial about her being an accomplice to her father, which is interesting. Most others have fallen in line with this thinking, quick and easy, although Alana also finds herself angry at it.

"How does that make *you* feel?" Will says. He has an awful tendency to talk back, be rude.

(If he was anyone else, he would already be at his dinner table. But he can't eat his personal projects.)

"I find it obscene," he replies.

He doesn't. He knows what Abigail is— a victim he can shape into something more— and he knows he can mold that, as well, when she wakes up.

Freddie Lounds' articles are amusing, even if just because of how everyone around him finds them wrong and disrespectful. No one has any clue about the truth sewn into them, careful; although Freddie Lounds does not know that what she is saying is true. She's just extrapolating from her own beliefs about him and about his career. He wonders if she will ever truly find out.

He cares about Abigail Hobbs; that's something he realizes while following Eldon Stammets. He cares deeply about her as he cocks his gun at the doctor, disgust lacing his every movement.

"The journalist said you understood me!"

"I don't," he snaps.

(He understands killing. He understands using people for a better end, like making them into meat. But he doesn't understand the mushroom obsession, the fixation with mycelium. He wants to connect, and Will can't blame him, but he doesn't try to do it like that — he just doesn't connect. It's useless, anyway, to attempt to connect. No one would understand him, no one *will* understand him for what he is or for what he does. Apart from Dr. Lecter, maybe. But he doesn't want to think too much about him just yet.)

They take Abigail back to her room in the hospital, and the man is taken into custody, and he feels a thin layer of regret. He wishes he could've killed him, given him to his dogs. He deserves that and more.

"A surrogate daughter," Hannibal says. "You killed her father, Will. You can't take his place."

Well, he wouldn't kill girls that looked just like her, at the very least.

Will can't help it. When he sees Marissa Schur's body in the antler room, he looks at Hannibal, anger striking in his eyes. He hopes he doesn't notice it, but it's hard to avoid it — why? What for, beside upsetting Abigail and making Nicholas Boyle seem like the perpetrator? It doesn't make any sense. Hannibal's motives are still not clear-cut in his mind, as much as he tries to put himself in his place.

"Marissa!" Abigail cries out.

"I need you to leave the room," he breathes out, desperate, grabbing her and trying to pull her back downstairs.

It doesn't take long for Nicholas Boyle to appear and to have *attacked* Hannibal, Alana and Abigail.

Will isn't stupid. He draws in a sigh and settles on Hannibal's desk, an action that makes him frown in distaste.

"Abigail killed Nicholas Boyle, didn't she?" he asks.

He seems surprised, for a split second. "Yes."

"Did you help her hide the body?"

Hannibal takes a second to answer. "Yes," he says once again. He swallows. "I assume Uncle Jack won't be notified."

"I care too much for Abigail to send her to prison, Dr. Lecter." He tilts his head. "We have to protect her."

"That we do," Hannibal says, leaning in to put a hand on his shoulder. "We have to take care of her like Garret Jacob Hobbs didn't."

The touch makes electricity go through his body; he doesn't notice just how starved for touch he is until someone *does* touch him. And when that someone is a killer just like him, well, it makes his body feel like it's on fire. He resists the urge to turn around and kiss Hannibal madly, nodding as he watches out of the window, trying to seem dejected and scared.

Hannibal is a killer just like him; Hannibal is a killer and he's a cannibal. While their *modus operandi* might be different, his much more theatrical, at least they have things in common. Things he never thought he would have in common with anyone he wasn't catching. And he doesn't plan to catch Hannibal, oh no. Not unless he *has* to.

"So killing someone... even if you have to... it feels *that* bad?" Abigail asks, a deep sadness in her eyes. She still has that scarf tight around her neck, hiding the deep scar her father brought upon her.

Will lets out an airy breath. "It's the ugliest thing in the world," he tells her.

Hannibal watches carefully, doesn't comment.

It *is* the ugliest thing in the world. He'd love to claim he loves it for the beauty of it, something pretentious like what Hannibal probably tells himself, but matter of fact is that he loves it for the ugliness of it. There's nothing more disgusting than taking the intestines out of someone, nothing more viscerally gross than watching life leave someone's eyes as they slowly but surely bleed out. It's an exhilarating feeling, to bathe in it, in the repulsion of what he does.

He could never stop doing it, now. It's addictive, to hold so much power over someone's life.

"Did you just... *smell* me?" Will hisses when Hannibal sniffs close to him, his nose upturned.

"Difficult to avoid," he says, teasing. "I must introduce you to a finer aftershave. It smells like it has a ship on the bottle."

Will laughs dryly. "I keep getting it for Christmas."

The case of the Angel Maker is fascinating, even if just because of the Christian upsetting of it all. He almost wishes he would've come up with something like it, but it would involve getting noticed by the authorities, and that is the opposite of what he wants. But the way the wings spread out... it's definitely something he'd do if he was a bit more bold, being raised in the Bible Belt and whatnot.

(He recalls the memories of going to church every Sunday with clarity, sometimes going on Wednesdays whenever his father deemed it appropriate. He was taught about God and sin, about God's all-loving wrath. He has always been fascinated with the idea, as much as he might not really believe in the God they present— in an angry God who yet loves all. If he was less of a coward, perhaps he would translate that into his murders.)

He convinces Jack that they should go to the farm Budish had that near death experience in the next day; that if he was to kill himself he would not do it anywhere else, that rushing it was unnecessary. It had been a long day, anyway, and Jack had agreed without much pushing, saying he was going to go back to working on the office, that the field drained the life out of him. Will was inclined to agree, but because he would much rather be sucking the life out of someone else.

As soon as Jack leaves, he heads toward the farm Budish's ex-wife had pointed them to. He draws in a breath and puts on the plastic suit he has in the back of his car for when he has to do messier jobs— jobs that might leave DNA for him to be found guilty with. He has to be careful, wearing a hair cap and gloves, shoes a size too big.

"Budish."

The man is in the barn, looking at the knife in his hand pensively. Of course, he can't make himself an angel and hang himself up— that is much too hard for one man to do on his own. Perhaps he could do it, in theory; enough for the police to believe it was a suicide, perhaps.

He turns to face him, and makes a noise. "Hello." He clears his throat, looking at him, seeing something beyond what most people see. "Are you here to help me?"

"Yes," he nods. "I can help you become an angel. I will hang your body up, right in those ledges."

Budish smiles. "Thank you. Could you give me your name, to thank you by?"

"I'm Will Graham," he says. "Special Agent."

"Thank you, Will Graham." He laughs a little and then pulls off his shirt, to expose what will be his wings when Will is done with him. "You have them all fooled, do you not? I can see the fire in your head. I can see you."

"They can see me," he says. "Just not as much as they should." He hums. "Get on your knees, give me the knife."

Budish nods and hands him the knife, settling on the hay. He closes his eyes, grits his teeth. "Thank you, Will Graham. I hope you go unnoticed for this."

"I hope so, too."

He doesn't want to be *completely* unnoticed, though; he wants to be seen. Be seen by one man, specifically.

He starts cutting into Budish's back, and he tilts his head as he goes through the motions of spreading his flesh and skin the same way he did. He's imagined himself in the position enough to figure it out— Budish screams, but the barn is so far away from everything else that he doubts there will be any problems.

When he comes there with Jack, he doesn't react to the body as much as he could. He's hung up in one of the ledges, just as promised. The plastic suit settles on the back of his trunk, cleaned up of any remains of blood. It's a bit of a sentimentality thing, in all honesty, as he has worked with the same suit for years now. He knows it's suspicious for it to be there, but as long as nobody looks at the trunk of his car while he's off on a trip it should be alright — he keeps it on the very back of his closet, whenever he's not about to murder someone.

"It's getting harder and harder for me to look," he says.

"Then quit," Jack replies.

He exhales.

"No one's making you look alone."

"But I *am* looking alone."

He can feel something changing inside himself, but he wouldn't be able to say what it is. He just knows that this is far beyond his usual scope of neuroses, the one he's used to since he has memory. No, this is something else.

When he starts hallucinating the sound of a hurt animal, he doesn't call Alana, he doesn't bother anyone with it. Instead, he goes and gets an appointment with a neurologist, knowing that there must be *something* going on in his brain.

The neurologist is as far removed from Hannibal as possible, a nice man with kind eyes and a bright smile. He takes him to get a brain scan and he remains stock-still inside the machine, even as the noise blares right into his ears, without any stop in sight.

He draws in a breath, seeing Marissa Schur's body hang on top of him, the deer antlers pushing into her slim frame. He can see Hannibal against her, her lying dead as he slowly pushes her against the antlers, watching her being bled slowly and purposefully. His eyes remain wide as he watches him, impassive, wanting nothing more than to kiss him for having

the desire to screw with his head, to be his psychiatrist, to take him and make him into what he wants him to be.

He's already what he is, though.

"You have anti-NMDA encephalitis," the neurologist tells him. The right side of his brain is a bright, angry red in the scan, while the left side remains untouched by it. "I will prescribe you some medication to deal with it. Take one pill twice a day for two weeks, then check with me. It should go away by then."

"Okay," he says. "Thank you so much."

He takes the prescription paper in his hands.

There's no doubt that Hannibal would've taken advantage of his illness if he knew. He'd have fun with it, with his deteriorating mental state— what a shame that he can't, now that he knows.

He stops in his tracks right as he walks into his cabin in Wolf Trap, his little bag of medication in his hand. Although... he can still make him think he's got it; he can still fake losing time, having hallucinations, even having issues with spatial neglect if he does a test for that on him.

He can't help but smile as he closes the door behind himself.

Oh, this is going to be so much *fun*.

Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

Let's Go Gays Let's Go

thank you so much for the warm reception this fic has gotten. i hope you like this chapter!

"Draw me a clock," Hannibal tells him.

Will isn't stupid. He knows what tests are done for what things; he knows this is for spatial neglect. He did just enough research for it, but with studying criminology he came across various illnesses used under the unconsciousness and insanity defenses. Encephalitis was one of them, unsurprisingly, as cases that go bad enough can make people lose time.

And that's what he's going to portray.

"Why?" he asks.

Hannibal's not going to be honest, is he? Of course not. Can't let him know he's got a neurological issue when his whole manipulation is based off the presumption that he's mentally ill. To be fair, he is — it's not like people right in the head kill people — but he's not mentally ill in the way he wants him to be framed as under the right lighting.

"A handle to reality," he says. "Something you can turn to, when you're not sure what is happening outside or inside your head."

He resists the urge to scoff as he grabs the notebook. "It is 7:31 pm., I'm in Baltimore, Maryland, and my name is Will Graham."

He deliberately makes the clock fucked up. It's a little difficult, but he's practiced in case he sprung the dreaded clock test on him — the handles are outside of it, the numbers pressed tightly together. He hands the notebook back to Hannibal, and he watches him as he tries to keep his expression as neutral as possible.

"Very good," he says dryly.

"I feel like I've dragged you into my world," Will says to Hannibal, slow and exhausted, as he presses his hand against his forehead, wiping a line of blood from it.

"I got here all on my own," Hannibal tells him soothingly, giving him a small smile.

Hannibal looks handsome like this, he thinks briefly. Bloodied up, right after killing a man in what he can get to call self-defense. He looks at the body of Hannibal's patient and he wonders if Budge really did kill him, or if Hannibal got enough of him being annoying and snapped his neck. Perhaps Budge was looking forward to it — perhaps Hannibal wanted to take that away from him.

"I suppose you did," he says.

Jack doesn't question it. Jack doesn't question anything, apart from what he asks Hannibal about Budge. Everyone is so blind to him, his spell bewitching so many; none of them see him for what he is, except those that already know him for what he is, like Budge and like him.

It's frustrating, to have to hide himself so well that no one notices it, while Hannibal almost *flaunts* it out in the open, with offhanded comments about murder and thinly veiled cannibalism puns. It's maddening, but it makes him all that more attracted to him — the way he manages to camouflage himself while not really *trying* to is quite an admirable quality. Well, to him, at the very least.

The realization that Hannibal is, apart from the Copycat Killer, also the Chesapeake Ripper, comes to Will embarrassingly late.

It is not until Dr. Abel Gideon starts claiming that title that it dawns on him. It's only when Miriam Lass' arm pops up in that observatory that it dawns on him. If anyone is aware of how distressed Jack is over it all, it's Hannibal. Hannibal knows everything, and Hannibal fits the profile damn well. He used to be a surgeon; he's sophisticated and theatrical, and he lacks motive except the disgust towards *rudeness*.

And Hannibal *has* been helping him profile the Ripper, although he didn't think about it until now.

He hates it. He wants to go over to Abigail and tell her, even though she is probably aware. She probably knows like the back of her hand that Hannibal is the Ripper. Outsmarted by a teenage girl, but Abigail is more than that. She's their daughter now.

It feels strange, to consider having a family, much more so with Hannibal Lecter, with the Chesapeake Ripper. But as soon as he lets the scales fall from Hannibal's eyes, he knows the rest will all fall into place just fine. That he will get the chance to raise Abigail as his own, as Hannibal's own as well.

He wants it so bad it hurts. He wants to rush the process, to tell Hannibal he knows and that he's more than the self he's portrayed toward him, but he doesn't. He has to wait. He has to wait for the perfect chance, the perfect moment to show his true self to Hannibal — he may hide himself from the public, but he's not above dramatics.

"This isn't my normal type of crazy," Will pleads with Hannibal, trying to get into the mindset of this pretend-self he's portraying. An *innocent* man, unaware of what Hannibal is, slowly

getting worse and worse and pleading for his psychiatrist to *believe* him. "This could be... a tumor. A-a seizure. Something... something is wrong with me, and it's not what I'm usually dealing with!"

"I'll take you to a neurologist, Will," Hannibal concedes. "But if he doesn't find anything, you must accept that you may be struggling with mental illness."

Will sucks in a breath. He tries to seem defeated. "Yeah. Yeah."

Of course the psychiatrist is one of Hannibal's friends from medical school. He's not sure if he's *as* sketchy—he seems normal, for the most part, but Hannibal has a penchant for manipulating people. He wouldn't be surprised if they show a completely normal brain scan instead of the one he should get. He's been taking his medication, but he still should show up at least a little bit inflamed.

He sees the woman with her face pulled back in front of him, and he doesn't flinch. He stays there, still, with the plugs in his ears. He sucks in a breath and remains composed until they pull him off.

"Your scan turned up completely normal," Dr. Sutcliffe tells him.

He resists the urge to look at Hannibal tiredly. Instead, he attempts to look lost, scared.

"We can do more tests, but... I doubt they will come out as anything other than just as inconclusive as this one."

With the looks Hannibal gives him, he suspects Dr. Sutcliffe won't come out of this ordeal alive.

After his encounter with Georgia Madchen—her skin tight on his hand as he goes to leave it at the FBI—he has another test to go to. It's after hours, the hospital empty. Hannibal most certainly chose the hour, knowing Madchen would be following him around, waiting for a chance to strike. He told her he was alive as they followed each other to the forest—maybe she didn't enjoy that all that much; maybe she wasn't used to the idea.

He gets pulled off the machine after a while. Everything is empty. He goes and heads toward Dr. Sutcliffe's office, knowing what is waiting there for him. Yet another copycat murder—his skin pulled back grotesquely. The door has blood in it, so he makes work of opening it with his jacket, as to not contaminate the crime scene.

Indeed, there he is, his face pulled back, nearly decapitated at the jaw.

Katz tries to soothe him once the FBI gets there.

"You couldn't have done this without getting something on you and there's *nothing* on you, Will."

"Okay," he says shakily. "Okay."

Hannibal doesn't seem to mourn Dr. Sutcliffe. He's not surprised, of course. He's never mourned someone he's killed, that's against his job description.

(*Would he mourn him, if he had to kill him? Would he hold his body? Would he caress his cheek?* He hates the fact these thoughts swim around his mind in the first place, but he takes what he can get, the delicious feeling of his heart aching for someone else. He's never known that before.)

Alana is distraught when she goes to see Abigail and she finds out that she has two legal guardians now, two legal guardians who she is very familiar with. Will Graham and Hannibal Lecter. She's unsure if to wonder if that means they're together and have adopted her as their own, or if this is simply a show of them taking care of her the best way they know how.

"Hannibal," she says as she enters Hannibal's consult. "Since when are Will and you Abigail's guardians?"

Hannibal looks up from the book in his hands, gives her a small smile. "Oh, since two weeks after her father's... death." He shrugs. "I just had to pull a few strings to get to that. We care very much for her, and we are not her psychiatrist — *you* are — so it felt like the right step to take."

"No, it wasn't!" she exclaims. "You had known her for *two weeks*, and Will had just killed her father! How on Earth would that be the right move, Hannibal? Does she even talk to you? Does she *know* you two are her guardians?"

Hannibal huffs. "Of course she knows, Alana. We talk quite often — where else do you think she escapes the hospital to?"

She blinks. She hadn't considered that. "Oh. She escapes to come see you?"

"Yes. With Will she hasn't talked as much, but I'm sure there is no ill will between them."

"He killed her father—"

"As he was trying to kill her, Alana," he cuts her off. "It will all be fine. We were feeling paternal toward her, as I discussed in multiple sessions with Will, and so I decided to take the next step in terms of paternalism."

"This is beyond unethical," she mumbles.

"I am aware." He walks closer to her, puts a hand on her shoulder. "I am just trying to do what is best for Will, Abigail and I, Alana. Ethics be damned."

"Of course," she says, considering this. She doesn't want to just let this go. She wants to argue — but what is there to do? It's not like Hannibal will change his mind. It's not like Hannibal and Will are going to stop being Abigail's legal guardians just because she doesn't like it. "She seems to be making progress."

Hannibal hums. "Indeed," he says. "Your psychiatry is nurturing, Alana. I am trying to add that... fatherly love to it. A love unlike her biological father's, at least."

She swallows thickly around the lump in her throat. "Of course. She might need it."

"Oh, she does need it." Hannibal pulls away from her. "Is that what you came here for?"

It feels rash, now that she thinks about it, to come in unannounced to Hannibal's consult just to yell at him. She considers what else she could do.

"Uh, how's Will?"

"Sick," he replies. "I'm trying to help him through it. He was convinced it must be something neurological, so I took him to Dr. Sutcliffe and... well, you know what happened to him." He sighs.

"Yeah," Alana says. "So, no um.. nothing neurological?"

"Nothing. Will seemed pretty upset by that."

"Having to confront the fact one might be mentally ill is really stressful, even to someone who's so acquainted with their own mind as Will is."

Hannibal considers this. "Indeed, it is. Would you like a beer?"

"I didn't mean to come here to drink—"

"Oh, come on, Alana." He smiles at her, and she's struck with that feeling of why she found him so attractive the years prior. "It's on the house. Let's drink."

She laughs softly. "Okay, okay. Your beer's too good to pass it up, anyway."

When Abel Gideon escapes from prison, Will isn't amused. He tries his best to remain composed as he goes to settle into the backseat of his car. He knows Chilton is in the observatory, God knows in what condition, but he's not interested in finding out, really.

"I was expecting the Chesapeake Ripper," Gideon says, turning to face him. "Or are you he?"

Will smiles at him. "No," he says. "I'll take you to who is, though."

Gideon's brows raise in curiosity. "You know him?"

"Indeed," he says, cocking his gun at him. "Drive."

He's tempted to keep up his charade, to pretend to be hallucinating Hobbs or something, but he doesn't — he takes Gideon to Hannibal's house and walks him in.

"I got your imitator, Hannibal," he says, voice low.

He sees Hannibal doubt, surprise in his eyes. He immediately knows — he was going to let him know, let himself be *seen* by him, but not right now. It was going to happen, but not now. He's a little early. He can see Hannibal trying to make sense of it in his head.

"How is Abel Gideon imitating me, Will?" he asks, curious.

"Your murders," he says, calmly. "Your identity."

He blinks, tries to appear confused, concerned. It doesn't quite stick. "Do you believe me to be the Chesapeake Ripper, Will?"

He grins at him. "I do not *believe* you to be the Ripper, Dr. Lecter," he says. "I *know* you are the Ripper." He turns to Gideon, who looks curious beyond belief, as if he is watching a TV show he enjoys. He looks back at Hannibal. "We can cook him together, if you wish. Although I'm not as good at masking the flavor as you are. Never had to — never made any fancy dinners."

Hannibal's eyes widen, and he can see desire in his eyes, resisting the urge to pull him in and kiss him senseless. "Since when do you know?" he asks, gripping at one of the seats in his table.

"Since you gave me your protein scramble," he says, tilting his head.

Hannibal smiles. "What a cunning boy you are, Will," he says.

He can't help but shudder at his words, tilting his head and smiling right back at him. "I know I have encephalitis," he says. "Or had, rather. I've been very careful with my medication."

"Of course," he says, still sounding impressed. He turns to Gideon.

"What should we do with him? I did theorize that the Ripper would kill him. I don't know if you'll be keen on that."

"I'd like to have him for dinner," Hannibal replies. He smiles at Gideon. "I'll take good care of you, Dr. Gideon. I'll drop your body off at Dr. Chilton's place, if you wish."

"I doubt I have many chances to escape this," Gideon draws.

"You don't," Will says. "So there's not much use in fighting it. But of course, people are unruly, so..."

Hannibal hums and goes to his kitchen, taking only a minute or so to come back with a needle with a clear substance in it. He presses it against Gideon's neck without a second's worth of doubt, and watches him as he goes limp.

"Help me take him to my basement," Hannibal says.

"Of course," Will says. He swallows. "Did you truly have no idea?" he asks as he grabs Gideon with Hannibal's help.

"I wanted you to experience the darkness inside you. I didn't know you already had experienced it thoroughly. You made a very good job at pretending, Will. I must say I'm impressed."

"Thank you." The basement is dark, but lit up just enough by the fluorescent lights that he can see some of Hannibal's tools. There's machinery with very sharp blades, for what Will assumes is cutting up body parts; there's a freezer that's under lock and key. He's sure that anyone who came here alive before him didn't come back out. He sucks in a breath. "What were you going to do? To show me my darkness, as it were?"

"I was going to frame you for murder," he says.

"Oh."

He pauses for a second to think it over. It's immediately obvious— the copycat killer.

"The copycat's murders," he says.

"Yes," he nods. "Cassie Boyle, Marissa Schur, Donald Sutcliffe and Georgia Madchen. Check your fishing baits, throw them to the garbage, just to be safe."

He hums. "I didn't realize you had put them in there. That's a great way to incriminate me."

"I was also going to frame you for Abigail's murder."

Will's head snaps up right as they put Gideon down on the cold floor, handcuffing him to the wall with a chain. He can't stop the anger from leaking past his facade of neutrality.

"Abigail?"

"I wasn't actually going to kill her," he says, shaking his head. "I can't stomach the thought. I would've just taken a pound of flesh from her. She would've allowed me to."

"Yeah, because she was her father's accomplice for a year," he snaps. "It would've been coercion."

"She wouldn't have missed it, Will," he argues. "It would've been just... her ear, perhaps."

"And what would you have done with it? Shove it down my throat?"

"Yes."

Will sucks in a breath. "Ah."

"Yes," he nods. "But I'm glad I don't have to do all that for you to know the beast inside of you."

He nods. "Of course not. You don't have to do anything for me to know me. I already do."

Hannibal steps closer to him. The basement is still dimly lit, and they've walked away from Gideon's limp body now. He leans in to cup both of his cheeks, his face in his cold hands,

looking at him, *seeing* him like no one has before. But he sees Hannibal right back, and it is far too vulnerable.

Will leans into the touch and he steps closer, until they're sharing air, breathing hard as he bumps noses with him.

"May I kiss you?" Hannibal asks, voice raspy and low with desire. It's burning and raw; Will thinks about killing someone with him, tasting blood inside Hannibal's mouth. Desire pools low in his belly.

"Yes," he breathes out.

Hannibal kisses him. He kisses him madly, one of his hands moving back to the nape of his neck, grabbing him as they devour each other. His eyes squeeze shut, his hands roaming Hannibal's back as he kisses him, tongues meeting; he bumps against one of the walls, grabbing at him desperately.

"I was so lonely before you," Will admits between kisses, lustful, hungry. Starved.

"Me, too," Hannibal admits.

The moment, laced with shadows, is one of the most perfect moments Will has had with anyone else. He wouldn't trade it for the world—the touch of another murderer, another cannibal, is better than anything he's ever had. Better than any meal at anyone's table. Except perhaps for Hannibal's.

"We don't have to be lonely anymore," Hannibal says, cupping his cheek once again. "We will not be lonely anymore."

Will musters a grin.

"We will not, Hannibal. Never again."

There's a promise there, when Hannibal leans in and kisses him once again.

Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

oh we're really in it now

this chapter is the longest by far, because a lot of things had to happen in the midpoint.

i hope you enjoy!

The morning after, Will wakes up in Hannibal's bedroom, content and awake as he leans in to press a kiss to Hannibal's neck.

"We could always just stay in Baltimore," he starts, "but I'd love a... change of scenery, as it were."

"Of course," Hannibal says. "Florence was where I became a man. Perhaps I should return to Italy."

"I don't know any Italian," Will says. "But I suppose I can learn." He hums. "Abigail is coming with, correct?"

"Indeed," he says. "I couldn't leave her behind, even if I wanted to, which I do not. She is... very perceptive. We can always get her out of the psych ward. We *are* her legal guardians, after all."

"We could," he agrees. "Considering your love for, um, *theatricality*, maybe we could... start leaving hints, clues, for the FBI to know we are not as innocent as we appear to be." He hums. "Perhaps I should start leaving bodies around."

"And what then?" Hannibal asks. "Disappear with Abigail in tow?"

Will grins at him. "I'm sure you have houses all over the globe," he says. "Disappearing would be rather fun, I say."

"Would you be interested in faking your abduction?" he asks, leaning in to trail his nimble fingers down Will's cheek bone. "An unwilling accomplice to the Chesapeake Ripper."

"Mm," he nods. "That'd be fun. We could make a crime scene out of my cabin. What about Abigail?"

"We could still go by faking her death," Hannibal offers. "Or I could just take her along. They're rather keen on believing she was her father's accomplice, anyhow. Her following the Ripper wouldn't be such a huge leap."

"She *was* her father's accomplice," he intercepts. "So... yeah. That's a good idea. But we should let it go on, for a second, maybe."

They remain there, curled against one another, for several minutes in comfortable silence.

"This was supposed to happen after I framed you," Hannibal starts, "but... Miriam Lass is not dead. I have been keeping her alive, messed up her memories so she doesn't remember I was her captor."

Will lets out a huff of surprise. The Ripper keeping a victim alive was uncharacteristic—freeing them, even more so. But he guesses Miriam Lass hasn't done anything wrong, hasn't been rude by any means; she doesn't deserve to die then, doesn't deserve to be displayed and humiliated.

"Who's your scapegoat, then?"

Hannibal grins at him. "Dr. Frederick Chilton."

Will lets out a quiet laugh at that. "Who's gonna fall for that?"

"Everyone, when she identifies him as her captor, and hopefully shoots him."

"That's fair," he says.

"After we're done dining on Gideon, I plan to leave his body in Chilton's place, and when Miriam Lass is found, there will be enough clues in the shed that they will go directly to Chilton's place."

"Then?"

"Then I'll drug him and kill all the FBI agents therein, further incriminating him."

Will groans and pulls him into a hungry kiss. "You are *so* sexy when you're this smart, you know that?"

Hannibal laughs. "Thank you, dear," he says.

Their plans are forgotten as Will settles on top of Hannibal. They have all the time in the world to set them in motion.

Will and Hannibal go to the psych ward together, hands brushing together as they go to the front desk.

"We'd like to take Abigail Hobbs out of the ward," Hannibal says. Will nods in agreement.

"Of course," the woman on the front desk says, smiling as she goes to deal with the paperwork therein. "You are her legal guardians?"

"Yes," Will replies, voice low.

"I didn't think the Hobbs girl would get, uh." She files through the papers, finds the ones for retiring a patient out of the ward. "Folks like *you* as her new legal guardians. I imagine the paperwork was a lot of trouble." There's a vague note of disdain in how she speaks, the way her lips curl around every word about their not-relationship like it's a crime.

Hannibal looks at Will, in that dangerous way that he finds himself understanding fully. It's the look of a predator who has just found its next chatty lamb to take for slaughter. He nods at him solemnly, before turning back to the woman like nothing at all had happened.

She, of course, does not notice.

"Of course," Hannibal says. "The paperwork was a pain, but we have worked through that hurdle, and we want to get our daughter out of the hospital. If you so please, could you hand us the papers we need to sign?"

"But of course," she says, still looking at them with her brows furrowed, her lips pursed. She hands them the papers, and they make quick work of signing them before they allow them to take Abigail out of there.

"I haven't had as much contact with Abigail as I'd like to," he says as they walk up the stairs. "What if she doesn't want anything to do with me?"

"Oh, she will," Hannibal says lightly. "If she wants something to do with me, she wants something to do with you."

He chuckles at that, but he does enjoy the idea. The idea of being a *unit*, that if one of them goes the other has to go as well, of being part of a package deal. It makes him feel warm inside, makes him feel like they're dating. But talking about dating feels juvenile — especially when they are two serial killers about to get their surrogate daughter out of a mental facility. They're in a relationship, yes, he's pretty sure of that, even if they haven't talked about it.

He tries not to laugh when the thought comes to him. *Perhaps we're just partners in crime.*

"Hello, Abigail," Will says, hovering by the door when they get to Abigail's room.

Abigail looks up. "Hi," she says. "What are you doing here?"

"Getting you out of this place," Hannibal tells her. "We are your legal guardians, and we have decided that it would be better for your health to leave this facility."

She lights up. "Of course," she says.

As soon as they're out of the facility, Will perks up and starts talking.

"What shady shit did you do to get us to be her legal guardians?" he asks, looking at Hannibal lovingly.

Hannibal huffs and gets in the car, Abigail joining in the backseat as Will settles on the co-driver's.

"It was quite a pain, to let me be put down as her guardian," he says as he starts off the car. "Even more so to put *you* as the other one."

Abigail clears her throat and says, "I assume you are in a relationship now?"

Will looks at Hannibal, and he looks back at him with the same cluelessness he has right now. Has Hannibal ever been in a relationship before? He doubts it. It's not really something he does, unless it benefits him from a manipulative point of view. Now there's actually something going on — it must be something new for him.

"I suppose so," Hannibal settles on. "We are partners, you could say."

She nods.

Will clears his throat. "I know you killed Nick Boyle," he says. Abigail's face pales. "I know you helped your father. But that doesn't stop me from loving you." He looks back at her, turning on his seat, ignoring the fact he should be wearing a seatbelt. "We are all killers here, Abigail."

"Do you mean like, literally killers as in—"

"I am just like Hannibal," he informs her. "I am sure you are more than aware of his history as the Ripper."

"Yes," she agrees. "You are just like him?"

"Yes," he nods. "Just like him. Eating people, killing people. We're not going to make you participate in any of it, of course, especially when you have such trauma around the issue — but we are your fathers now, Abigail. It is a part of your family you have to accept."

"You're much better than my dad," she says, looking at him with a slight smile on her lips. "I couldn't find it in me to hate you or not trust you because you happen to have the same... *hobbies*. At least, um, at least you won't kill girls that look just like me."

Hannibal looks at her through the windshield mirror. "*Never* girls who look just like you, Abigail. Never again."

She lights up at that. "Of course," she says. "In some years maybe I'll... join the family business once again. I can get used to it."

"Take your time," Will tells her.

The rest of the car ride is uneventful, until they end up at Hannibal's place.

"We have lots of plans for our near future, Abigail," Hannibal starts. "So perhaps I should tell you about them during dinner."

Dinner takes a while to be ready, mainly from the hurdle of amputating Gideon's leg and taking him to the table, settling him on the spot of the guest of honor. Hannibal settles near

him, and Will is on the opposite side from her seat while Abigail settles next to Hannibal.

"I didn't know you two would have a daughter," Gideon comments, voice lacking any worry most people would have in this situation.

"I killed her dad," Will says, shrugging. "While working for the FBI, I mean."

"Yeah," Abigail replies as she watches Hannibal cut up a portion of Gideon's cooked leg and serve it to her. "He was, um, the Minnesota Shrike. I don't know if you heard of him, Dr. Gideon, you were sort of, well, in prison."

"I think I heard a thing or two," he says. "Somethin' about... abducting eight girls."

"Yes," Abigail says rather stiffly. "Girls who looked just like me."

"So you adopted her after killing her dad?" Gideon asks, looking at Will. "That's quite an interesting story. How long have you known they eat people?"

"First time I ate with Hannibal," she replies. "Recognized the taste. I found comfort in the fact that they wouldn't, you know, kill girls just like me."

"Never, Abigail," Hannibal says, his free hand going to take her hand on his own, giving it a gentle squeeze. "We would never kill anyone who looked like you. We are *nothing* like your father."

"I know," she says as she starts eating. "And well..." she sighs. "What are our plans?"

"We're going to leave Gideon's body at Chilton's place," Will starts. "And then, of course, Chilton will be incriminated as the Chesapeake Ripper, although Hannibal plans to still leave a hint or two that will point to his direction."

"I love this," Gideon says between bites of his leg. "Both the food and your plans."

"Thank you," Hannibal says. "Afterward, we'll fake Will's abduction and go with you in tow to Italy. We can live the rest of our days there, although we'll have to keep a lower profile than usual."

"Italy?" Abigail perks up, smiling. "That's nice. I assume fake identities for everyone?"

"Yes. I'll do a good job with them, I promise. I can get you into a college as an international student."

Will thinks that well, there's nothing like her father killing girls in the colleges she went to in Italy. She'll be safe, still haunted by the memories but not as haunted as if they kept being in the States, looking for a place where the walls don't scream of the murders she was forced to be part of.

"That'd be great," Abigail says. She smiles at him, warm, without a hint of worry or fear.

"Thank you, dad."

"Of course," Hannibal says.

As they slowly eat Gideon's limbs, Will can't help but think that God, he loves his family.

"There's, well — do you have any like, extras of your little plastic suit?" Will asks as he settles on Hannibal's bed, swinging his legs.

Hannibal smiles. "I make them myself. I have a smaller one I made, in hopes that it'd fit you. You could try it on."

"I'll certainly try," Will says as he goes and takes it, starting to put it on. It fits for the most part—the shoulders are a little too broad, the legs a little too tight, but it's good otherwise. He smiles and leans in to kiss Hannibal on the lips. "It fits, for the most part. You can make a better one some other day."

"Certainly," Hannibal says. "So, we're going to kill that very rude woman. I found out where she lives, and she doesn't seem to have any security installed."

Will hums. "That's nice for us," he says. "Not so nice for her. Let's get her."

Her house is an austere little place in southern Minnesota, small and unassuming. Of course she has no security, it being in the outskirts of the city, and her pay as a receptionist for a mental hospital probably not letting her to have much in part of luxury.

"We're not making her the next Ripper victim, are we?" Will asks. "It can be a little too obvious, with the fact we've had recent contact with her and whatnot."

"She sees hundreds of people everyday," Hannibal says. "I'm sure it'll take them far too long to connect the dots, and by then we'll already be in our way to Italy."

"That's fair."

Will picks the lock of the back door, and they come in like shadows, seeing her on the couch, half-asleep as the TV drones on and on. She straightens up, eyes wide, and before she can say anything, Hannibal strikes her in the throat.

The night is, all in all, a blast. They take out a lot of her organs, but leave her heart there, settled on her dislocated jaw, as they string her up on the door to the church a few miles away from her home. It's a Baptist church, old and ratty, quiet and lacking any aesthetic.

"There we go," Hannibal says as he looks at the art hanging above them, her body stitched up on all parts, arms outstretched. "Their beliefs have come to the door."

"Sure have," Will says. He grew up Baptist—he knows it all like the back of his hand. He doesn't need Hannibal's commentary to be reminded, but it still feels like a petty revenge against what he was taught in church. "We have broken all commandments, all rules given forth— well, most of them, anyway," he says. He pulls Hannibal into a kiss. "Especially this one."

"Man shall not lie with another man," Hannibal breathes into his lips. "I know that one well."

"Raised Catholic, weren't you?"

"Yeah," he nods. "All I got from it is the importance of aesthetics."

Will laughs, a hearty chuckle that leaves right out of his heart. "Southern Baptists couldn't even leave me with that much."

"Killing must feel good to God, too," Hannibal tells him as he caresses his cheek, in the same manner he did what feels like infinities ago, "He does it all the time."

"And are we not created in his image?" Will echoes.

"It's the Ripper," Will tells Jack as he looks at what is in front of him. "I see the Ripper and I feel the Ripper."

Zeller hums. "He cut off her tongue and replaced it with her heart," he says.

"Put it in front of the church she attended, too," Price says. "Nasty stuff."

Katz turns to Will. "Do you think the Ripper knew her personally?"

Will hums. "I think they might have met incidentally, enough for her to end up as one of his victims. He sees all of them as pigs, and so she had to do something piggish. Something rude... something she said, probably." He lets out a breath and turns to Jack. "Where did she work at?"

Jack looks through a file and he sighs. "She was a receptionist at the mental hospital Abigail Hobbs was being held in, before you and Hannibal officially took her out of there."

Will grimaces, makes a perfect mimicry of realizing a murder victim is someone you knew, even if briefly. "Oh... that's why she was familiar." He rubs his face with his hand. "She was... nice. She was perfectly normal. I don't know how she would've displeased the Ripper so much as to... *do* all of this to her."

"Who knows where they met," Zeller says.

All Will can think about as he continues to profile Hannibal and himself is the way this woman looked at them, the way she stared at them with a thinly veiled disgust, at their partnership, at their love, the way it flowed out of them when they were together. He wonders if the fact it's a little blatant will fuck up their faked abduction — probably not, he muses. Jack could easily just think he had *no* idea that Hannibal was the Ripper.

The next few days are a bit of a blur.

Hannibal kills another Ripper victim, and he leaves enough of a trail to take the team to that abandoned cabin where Miriam is, missing an arm, scared and scarred. He also leaves one

single fingerprint that strikes a DNA match — *Hannibal Lecter*.

"The Ripper wouldn't start leaving *prints* now, wouldn't he?" Will asks, tilting his head at the machinery.

"I don't think so, no," Jack says. "But the rest... all of it... points right to somewhere else, doesn't it?"

"The water," he says. "Couldn't we tell where it comes from?"

"I'm sure we could," Katz says.

A few hours later, they come up with an answer — Dr. Frederick Chilton.

Will almost wants to *laugh*, at the ridiculousness of it, but how the proof is right there. He fits the profile, except for the fact he's a bumbling fool of a psychiatrist. Hannibal would make much more sense, but they're blind to him, enchanted by him, his charming accent enough to dispel any doubts to the common man.

It's ridiculous; Will loves it.

When Chilton is brought into custody, he's speaking, almost rambling, about Hannibal Lecter having drugged him, how he woke up in his home, bloodied — that he hadn't killed Gideon, that he would never kill anyone. But the proof was all there, as much as Jack looked skeptic. And he should, all things considered. He *should* be skeptic, it's good that he is. Because things will show themselves very, very soon.

Miriam shoots Chilton, and Will gives them a blank stare when Price comes and says that there was nothing in Chilton's system — the chloroform had been quick acting, had dissolved while Chilton tried to escape from the police in a manner that made him look even guiltier than everything else did.

Will smiles, when he's left to his own devices. He'll finally escape this, all of this.

The day before Will gets abducted, he goes to have coffee with Katz.

Out of everyone in the Behavioral Science Unit, she's the only one he truly could ever stand. She's funny and spunky, nice to be around in a way Price and Zeller aren't. And he's held some rancor toward Jack — even though he wasn't actually sick, Jack didn't seem to care about it much. As long as he got results, it didn't matter just how sick his profiler got. The attitude was sickening; it was rude, almost.

"It all feels like such a mess," Katz says between sips of a cappuccino.

"What, Chilton being the Ripper?" Will asks. He tilts his head. "Because it really does. It's... it's unexpected, but I guess it makes sense."

"He's got the medical knowledge... he was involved in the case when it first popped up... he made Gideon think he was who *he* really was. That's..." She clears her throat. "It's quite

messed up."

"Yeah," he agrees. "He's in the hospital now, isn't he?"

"Yep," she says, popping the p. "He's probably going to go blind in one eye, from the gunshot. His jaw got fucked up, too."

"Damn," he says, staring down at the sweet tea he got. It's not anywhere near sugary enough. "Well, that's what he gets, I guess."

"Guess so." She clears her throat. "You know, I've heard about you seeing a psychiatrist but I don't think I've ever met him."

"Oh?" He perks up at that. "Yeah, uh, Jack didn't want it to be official. Wanted to keep my mental health, um, under the rug. So he's not technically my psychiatrist, at least, um, legally."

"But he acts like it, no?"

"Yeah," he agrees, shrugging. "He's Dr. Hannibal Lecter. He's written some papers on social exclusion, I think?"

"Oh, yeah! That name rings a bell," she says. "Where's he from?"

"Like, Lithuania or something." He tries to sound insincere, like he's not sure. "He has this really thick accent, and he wears the ugliest patterned suits."

Katz laughs, bright and honey-like. "Does he now?"

"Yeah," he says. He chuckles a bit, too, and he's a little shocked to find it sincere. He can't help but feel his cheeks heat up from it, from talking about his partner. "He's fun to be around, though. He's a pretentious ass."

"I always thought you love pretentiousness," she says. "With how you talk during cases, and what not."

He laughs. "I just like to sound smart sometimes." He downs the rest of his tea. "But yeah he's... uh, he's lovely." He looks down at the table.

"*Will*," Katz hisses, and even without looking at her, he knows her eyes are wide.

"What?" he asks, not looking up.

"Are you *dating* your psychiatrist?"

He makes a little noise of embarrassment.

"I didn't think he'd be the type to be down to date a patient."

"He's not, um," he starts, scratching the back of his neck, "he's not really my psychiatrist, as I said. Not officially, anyway."

"Well, you said he acts like your psychiatrist."

He shrugs. "We just... have conversations. And I like him, anyway. And he likes me back."

Katz laughs, vibrant. "You sound like a middle schooler."

He pouts. "Shut up, Beverly." He finally looks at her and manages a honest smile. "I'm just... really happy to know him, you know?"

"I'm glad to hear that."

"Just — don't tell Jack, alright? I don't want to think about his reaction."

She rolls her eyes. "Oh, he's like a mama bear around you. He'll go crazy. I promise I won't."

Oh, yes, he'll go crazy. When he gets told by Beverly that he and Hannibal were dating, he might have an aneurysm — when he realizes that Hannibal is the Ripper, that Hannibal's had him under his grip. Or at least that's the story that'll get told from the evidence.

He can't wait to see it all unfold.

"I think we should give the impression of you having a head wound," Hannibal starts, not wearing his suit while doing things like this, for once in his life. He hums as he takes a syringe, starts to put it in place to take Will's blood. "Perhaps we can let the blood drip down and out of your door, like you were being dragged out."

"That's a good idea," Will says.

He looks around his house. He had cried a lot about this, but he had given his dogs to a shelter two weeks before their grand last act in the United States. He hopes sincerely that they are taken care of and are adopted by someone good; the fact he has to leave them behind breaks his heart.

"And then we can fake a struggle. Move around your furniture, clatter knives across the floor, all to make it more convincing. I doubt Jack would buy that you went down without a fight."

"I'm very feisty," Will drawls, leaning in to kiss Hannibal as he drains his blood, until he has a good amount of it. It's a head wound kind of bleed, as they let it dribble down the hallway of his cabin and onto the exit, before stopping abruptly, apart from a few specks of blood here and there on the way to Hannibal's Bentley, where Abigail is waiting.

"How are you, Abigail?" Will asks, looking at her as she's settled on the backseat, the windows rolled up.

"I'm good," she says. "Should I turn on my phone? Leave a digital footprint, all of that."

"That's a great idea," Hannibal says, leaning in to kiss her on the forehead. "Very proud of you, Abigail. We'll go back inside, alright? We need to make this more convincing."

"Of course, dad," she says.

They go back to the house, making a deliberate effort to avoid touching the blood trail, and they make a *mess* — they flip the dining room table, as small as it is, let two knives clatter onto the floor. In between these actions, they kiss and fawn over each other, mumbling about how they'll finally be out, out of the ties of normal life, able to go and do whatever they wish, out of the country, far away from it.

"I love you," Will says for the first time as he smashes the glass on one of the kitchen compartments.

Hannibal goes still, his eyes widening just a modicum before he slips back into his relative normalcy. He draws in a breath and nods. "I love you, too."

"Not used to hearing that, are you?" he teases.

"Not at all," he says. "But I am glad to hear it from you." He pulls him into a quick hungry kiss. "I love you, Will."

"Me too," he says. "We don't have to be lonely anymore. We have Abigail, we have each other."

"Our plane tickets are ready," Hannibal says as Will presses him onto the wall, kissing him, his thigh between his legs. "We are so very close to getting what we have always wanted, Will. I see you, and you see me."

"You're a poetic, pretentious *bastard*," Will groans softly. "And I love you so very much. I see you."

Before it can get more heated, Will retreats and gives the finishing strokes to their masterpiece, titled *The Abduction of Will Graham* — they spray more of his blood over the couch, like they had been there when it all started, when Hannibal decided to abduct him.

"It paints a pretty picture, doesn't it?" Will says, smiling at him. "We were dating, and I had no idea of what you were... and you decided to show me."

"If you hadn't known, I wouldn't have been this terribly rude about it, I must say," Hannibal says, smiling at him fondly. "I would've much rather taken you to one of my installations, given you a first-class example of what I make out of the rude."

"Eat the rude," he says. He kisses him again. "I don't have that same kind of moral upstanding, Dr. Lecter."

"Oh, you just kill the easiest targets you can find?" he perks up.

"The best ones to not leave a pattern behind me," he mumbles into his mouth. "Sometimes I hear about someone being a terrible person and I go all the way to where they are to get them."

Rapists, pedophiles and such."

"A bit of a vigilante, aren't you?"

Will shows him a smile, all teeth. "I don't consider my actions those of a vigilante. Most of the time, anyway."

"And in the minority of the time?" he asks.

"Sometimes..." he starts, "sometimes I kill animal abusers. That's when I most feel like a vigilante. Like I am doing something *good*. Something... moral." He huffs. "Do you ever feel like you are doing something moral, Hannibal? Or have you stripped yourself away from the concept completely?"

"Morality doesn't matter," he replies, in this tone that lets him know he has sat on these thoughts for years upon years. "What matters is beauty. Aesthetics. Rudeness is unspeakably ugly to me, as you may know, dear Will," he says. "I am simply... taking out the ugliness in the world. *Elevating* it into something beautiful, while mocking them in death."

"Of course," Will says, mesmerized, fascinated by his lover's *modus operandi*, for his lover's intention behind each and every kill. After so long as a profiler, these answers are intriguing — like opening a door and seeing a room wider than the world itself. "You don't display each and every kill of yours, though."

"I don't," he agrees. "Sometimes... Sometimes I am simply more concerned with the meat than with the hunt."

Will laughs, a soft noise that rises up right from his throat, and he nods. "We should get out of here, now. Drive off."

"Of course," Hannibal says. "Let me just..." He grabs at Will's hair and pulls a few strands out, scattering them across the scene as he takes him into his arms, bridal style. He carries him out of the house, never stepping directly on the blood. He settles him on the co-driver's seat. The windows are tinted, and they make quick work of cleaning themselves up of any remaining blood before stopping at a gas station.

"Can I go buy some junk food?" Abigail asks.

"Absolutely not," Hannibal says immediately.

"Oh, come on," Will says, tilting his head. "Let her indulge in a little somethin', it won't kill her."

"I can't believe I have a daughter who wants to indulge in junk food," he jokes. But he looks at Abigail and says, "Sure. Make sure you're seen by the cameras, won't you?"

"Of course, dad," she says. She leans over that space between the seats to kiss his cheek before getting out of the car, going to the gas station.

Will smiles as he watches her go.

"I'm excited for this," he says, grabbing Hannibal's hand, giving it a squeeze. "I'm excited for this new chapter in my life."

"Me too," Hannibal replies. "I never thought I'd want this. A husband, a daughter— that those things were even *possible* for a man like me."

"You just needed a man like you for that," he says. He leans in to peck him on the lips. "And a daughter in the process of becoming something similar."

"She's traumatized because of things similar to what we do," he replies. "I do not want to harm her. But she seems all the more interested in learning about the way we live."

He laughs. "It runs in the blood. Hers, at least." He tilts his head. "What about yours, Hannibal?"

"When it comes to nature versus nurture, I choose neither," he says. "What about yours, Will?"

"Oh, I don't think I have much on a leeway in terms of Freudian excuses. Although with my mother's abandonment, maybe she was a serial killer and I am none the wiser."

He loves the laugh that comes out of Hannibal's mouth, vibrant and happy. It's a wonder to see him like this; it leaves him starstruck.

After a few more minutes, Abigail comes back from the gas station with a bag full of indiscernible junk food. She goes and settles on the backseat, pulling out a Coke and a sandwich from her bag.

"Just drive," she tells Hannibal between mouthfuls.

He grimaces, but he does drive.

"Where's Will?" Jack asks.

Katz gives him a shrug. "No idea," she replies. "It's kind of weird for him not to come in, though. Usually he calls in sick, or something."

"I've called him and he hasn't answered," he admits. "I think something might have happened to him."

"Should we, uh," Price starts, "should we go with you?"

Zeller clears his throat, clearly distraught. "He's asking if we should, you know, bring our... bring our work stuff."

Jack makes a noise of distress at the idea. Katz's heart pangs with a well-known shot of fear. "There is... no harm in doing that, I suppose," he replies.

Her drive to Wolf Trap, that painful hour, is terrifying. As she holds onto the steering wheel all she can think about is how that maybe she'll see her friend's body there, bloodied, mutilated, something worse, something better. But matter of fact is that he may be dead. Or he may be gone without a trace of him visible.

When she gets to Will's cabin, the first thing she sees is that the door is swung open.

The second thing she sees is the trail of blood that comes from inside the house and out into the entrance steps.

Bile rises up her throat and she gets out of her car, as Price, Zeller and Jack park around her.

"Oh God," Zeller whispers as he goes to the car he shares with Price to take the tools to do their job.

"I'll go first," Katz says, her heart in her throat as she starts to walk up to those steps. She takes a sample of the blood and then, ever so slowly, starts to step into the cabin.

There is no body, but that is only more disconcerting — there are clear signs of struggle all over the house, how Will put up a fight against whoever took him. She looks around — looks at the shattered glass, at the knives, at the *blood*. It's terrifying.

"He was abducted," Price says. "Oh God. Who could possibly... why...?"

"There's, uh," Zeller says. He sounds on the verge of tears. "There's blood on the couch. It looks like he got... stabbed in the stomach or elsewhere in his torso, while he was laying down."

"If he didn't get up that means it must've been, like—" Price starts. He pulls a face. "Like he was laying down *with* whoever took... whoever took him."

Jack's eyes shine with tears, but he keeps himself in control. It hurts to see him like this. "It was an intimate partner," he says. "He... he was kissing them. probably, when it... when it happened."

And then it dawns on Katz.

She makes a noise and she retches, struggles with the urge to throw up.

"Bev?" Price tries.

"I—" She closes her eyes, counts to ten, tries to ground herself as this horrible realization gets to her brain. "A-a few days ago, I went to have coffee with Will, and we were talking and..."

"You know who he was dating?" Jack asks.

"He asked me not to tell you, but, well." She lets out a hysterical little laugh. "It's... he was dating Hannibal. He was dating Hannibal."

Everything goes quiet, for a while, all up until Price quietly says, "Son of a bitch."

The rest of the investigation is cumbersome and exhausting, every single part of it, the way they realize what everything they knew about Hannibal Lecter was a lie. Jack excuses himself and they all can hear him punch at the wall of Will's room, followed by what sounds a lot like crying.

"Where are Will's dogs, anyway?" Zeller asks. "If... if he got abducted, then why aren't they here still? Did that son of a bitch kill them, or—?"

"I don't know," Katz replies. Her heart feels so empty.

She takes it up to herself, and she decides one thing— she will not let Hannibal get away with this. She will find them, she will find *him*, and she will rescue her friend. She has to. She *has* to.

Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

i forgot to update yesterday because i'm dumb as hell. but here's the fourth chapter!

thank yall so much for all the comments, kudos and bookmarks! i hope i hear more from yall with this update!

enjoy!

Even though they used fake identities, they still go far away from Italy at first. Their plane tickets go from the international airport at Baltimore to Sweden. After that, they'll slowly make their way through Europe, until getting to Florence.

Will is so much happier now that he's dead. Technically missing. Soon to be presumed dead. But let's say *dead*, for shorthand. His muscles are less tense, his step lighter. He can think clearly now, now that all he has is his partner, a fellow killer, and their daughter, who is walking down that exact same path. He doesn't have to worry about the FBI getting too close, he doesn't have to worry about Jack's worries— not anymore. All he has is Hannibal and Abigail, and he wouldn't want it any other way.

As they stay at a hotel in western Russia, Hannibal gets a new iPad and new phones for all of them, throwing their own into a river nearby.

"Let's say what Ms. Lounds has to say about all this, shall we?" Hannibal says as he settles down into bed.

"Ooh!" Abigail is excited at the prospect, immediately leaning against his shoulder to watch the site as it loads.

Will settles next to them, too curious to ignore the prospect of hearing about Freddie Lounds' take on this brand new situation. It'd be funny if she guessed that he had gone in his own volition, but that's too far, even for her, isn't it? She's always liked to extrapolate from visible fact, and there are no facts in their little abduction scene that says that he had gone willingly. Hell, he's bled all over the goddamn place.

WILL GRAHAM ABDUCTED BY HIS SIGNIFICANT OTHER, THE CHESAPEAKE RIPPER

Hannibal raises his brows. "Oh, so they have already put the dots together?"

"So it seems," Will says. "You did leave your basement as is. There's damning stuff there."

He laughs. "Yeah, that is fair."

"The headline makes it sound like you *knew*," Abigail points out. "Which you did, obviously, but that's not the, uh, the narrative we're pushing here."

"Let me read," Will says, grabbing the iPad. "It's probably clickbait. Not even Ms. Lounds goes that far, I'm pretty sure." He looks through the article and reads out loud passages he finds interesting. "*Will Graham's cabin in Wolf Trap, Virginia was turned into a gruesome crime scene, with his body missing. The evidence, according to the FBI, pointed to a significant other, which happened to be the same man Graham was seeing for psychiatric help — Hannibal Lecter.*" He hums and keeps reading. "*This also involves the fact Abigail Hobbs was taken out of her residence in a mental hospital a few weeks before the fact. She was seen in the security recordings at the gas station nearby Wolf Trap, with no signs of being harmed. It is likely that she is an accomplice of one of her legal guardians.*"

"They've fallen for it, word by word," Abigail says, eyes wide with amazement. "I'm so glad it worked out just right."

"I am glad as well, Abigail," Hannibal says, leaning in to kiss her forehead. "We've done an excellent job."

"We sure have," Will says, giving Hannibal his iPad back and taking her hand, squeezing. "I'm sure they'll think we're somewhere in Europe."

"Won't they check out Hannibal's home country?" Abigail asks. "Shouldn't we leave like, something there? So they lose track of us and think we're staying there?"

As Abigail speaks, Hannibal's shoulders tense up.

Will swallows. He doesn't know the details, but he's been handed the vague, generalized version by Hannibal before, in hushed whispers and mumbles that say *I have repressed every single bit of this. Do not ask me more.* So he hasn't. He leans in and puts a hand on Hannibal's shoulder, squeezing gently.

"We'd prefer to not go to Lithuania, Abigail," he says, hoping that suffices.

She makes a face. "Let me guess, you've got trauma just like I do?"

"Abigail," Will says, trying to sound more stern. "Yes, he does. No more questions, dear."

"Okay," she replies. "Sorry, dad."

Hannibal swallows around the lump in his throat, clears it. "It's okay. I have no plans of going back home, even if just for the FBI to get confused on their search for us." He licks his lips. "Although, there is a valuable asset there. A woman that has been guarding where I grew up in for years now."

"Me and Abigail could go talk to her, if you'd like?" Will offers.

"I'd really like to see what's Lithuania like," she says immediately, quickly on board. "You could go to Italy in the mean time, dad."

He hums. "I suppose I could. I will consider this, then, Abigail, Will."

Will leans in to kiss him. "Thank you, dear."

"Katz."

She turns around and sees Dr. Bloom, a woman she hasn't seen very often, but who she's heard of. As far as she's aware, she was kind of friends with Will, a colleague of his and also of Hannibal. God, how is she dealing with this?

"Dr. Bloom."

"Call me Alana, please," she says.

She shoots back, "Call me Beverly, then."

"Of course." She draws in a breath. "Where is the trail? Where do you think Hannibal and Will and— and Abigail are?"

Beverly stares. Oh, she's going on the manhunt, even though she's not supposed to. She's by all means not supposed to— she's not trained in the least, she's not FBI, she's just a psychiatrist. But she was close to Hannibal and so she must feel some sort of betrayed, which is what is leading her to this point. Fine, then.

"We have no way of knowing," she replies. "They must have used fake identities for their plane to Europe because— Europe is the closest thing to a location we have and yes, it's a wide place to search for three people— because we haven't found any records of them going on a plane in the last week."

"Europe, then." Alana sighs. "Hannibal was born in Lithuania. Maybe he'll do a rest stop there, if not stay there permanently."

Beverly hums. "That is a strong possibility. We have considered it, and if we are going anywhere, it will be Lithuania first. If there's no trace of him—" She draws a breath. She still can't believe Will is gone. "If there's no trace of him or of— of Will, then we will move on farther west. Other places they might have gone to are Italy and France."

Alana tilts her head. "Why?"

She shrugs. "We talked to Hannibal's psychiatrist, Dr. Bedelia Du Maurier, and those were her guesses."

"Did she know anything about what he does?"

"As far as we can tell, she had an inkling, but no proof to have come to law enforcement about it." She huffs. "She says that France fits with Hannibal's general preference for

aesthetics, and that Italy is the place where he moved into with his uncle when he was a young man. So we are going to scout those, as well, when it gets to it."

Alana nods gravely before taking a breath. She closes her eyes for a few seconds. "Do you think Will is dead?" she asks, in a whisper.

Beverly considers this.

"I think that if he was dead we would have definitive proof. He would've hung up his body in his own cabin, something. Made a... made a monument, like he usually does, as the Ripper."

"Maybe he's not acting as the Ripper."

"Maybe he's waiting for the perfect place to — to kill him and mount him." She shakes her head. "I don't know, Alana. This hurts. Be sure to check in with a therapist or something, okay? I know you and Will were friends, and that you and Hannibal were..."

That's when Alana breaks. Tears shine in her eyes. "He was my *mentor*," she exclaims. "I was close to him when I was in college and he was a tutor. He was... so nice. So kind. Such a... such a gentleman. I couldn't tell! I never could've been able to tell, if he didn't show all of us." A sob leaves her mouth. "I was so *blind*."

Beverly leans in to give her a half-hearted hug, which Alana leans into immediately, crying onto her lab coat. It's a weird position to be in, but she's not complaining. She's just no psychiatrist— she doesn't know what she's doing.

"He worked very hard to blind you," she replies. "To blind all of us. It's not really your fault, Alana."

Alana hiccups into her shirt before pulling away, cleaning off her eyes with her sleeves. "Yeah." She sniffles. "I know. I know."

"I'm sure you wouldn't be able to deal with just... staying behind, so would you like to come with us? I'm sure Jack will let you."

She nods. "Yeah. Yeah, I'd... I'd like to come with, if that's no issue."

Beverly gives her a smile. "It isn't, as far as I can tell. I'll go talk to Jack about it."

Alana returns her smile, shaky and broken; but it's a smile nonetheless.

"Lecter Castle," Abigail says, eyes wide as she looks over the gates.

"Yes." Will laughs, softly. "I'm with *royalty* here, Abigail. We're royalty with him."

"What is he? A prince?"

"Oh, a count," he says, shrugging. "Let's work our way up here. I'll — we'll figure it out. Come on."

It takes a bit of struggling, but he manages to pull Abigail up the gate, helping her up along with himself. There's light in one of the towers. He grunts as he throws himself down onto the grass, managing to land on his feet. His shoes are a size too big, a precaution he took just in case, which makes him trip a bit more. He turns around to Abigail and spreads his arms.

"Hey," he says. "I'll catch you."

"It's not even that high," Abigail replies. "I shouldn't be scared."

"We all have vertigo sometimes. C'mon, you're safe with me."

Abigail swallows as she throws herself to his arms, him catching her mid-flight, hugging her tight as she lets her down onto the grass. She rests her feet, lets out a sigh.

"I've always been a little afraid of heights. I went to the mountains with my parents a lot, but... I guess all of this took its toll on me."

"That's alright," he says, tucking a strand of her hair behind her ear. He marvels, for a little moment, at the fact she still has both. Hannibal had explained his plans to her— in some other universe where he didn't dare to let him know, he came in too late and one of her ears is missing, the scar tissue hidden behind her long brown hair. "Let's go to the tower that's light up, yes?"

"Of course."

The walk toward the tower is slow and tedious, like they're waiting for someone to shoot them. Which they may be doing — Hannibal's commentary about this woman all indicates to her being more or less the guardian of Lecter Castle, in absence of any Lecters. She may have a gun or two, ready to strike any trespassers.

They get to the tower without any issue, though. The stairs are stone, so they aren't found out by creaking wood as they go up to see her. Will gets a glimpse of her in the window— she's an older woman, a bit younger than Hannibal if he had to guess, although she has aged gracefully. Monolid and a round, yet stern face; black hair put up in a ponytail with plenty of gray hairs spreading from the scalp.

"Should we just knock?" Abigail asks in a whisper.

Will shrugs. He does knock twice, waits.

He can feel the bated breath, the confusion as to why someone is here. *No one should be here*, he can hear her think, strong and persistent as the door creaks open. A shotgun is propped on her shoulder, pointing directly to Will's face.

"We are Hannibal's family," Abigail says, panic rising into her voice rapidly. "We just came to see you, at his request."

The woman pulls a face. "Hannibal does not have a *family*."

Will blanches. "I am his significant other," he explains. "And she is our daughter." He clears his throat. "Not biological. But mind you, still family. Could you please put the gun down?"

She clenches her jaw and slowly puts her gun down. "What do you want from me?"

"Your help," Abigail says. "Dad's not really into coming back to Lithuania for reasons I still don't know and, well. He said you're a bit of a sharpshooter." She pauses, clears her throat. "What's your name? He never said."

She looks at her. Her face softens. "My name is Chiyoh. What about yours?"

"I'm Abigail Hobbs."

"Will Graham." He swallows around the lump in his throat. "How long have you been here? *Stuck* here?"

Chiyoh looks down, leans against the wall. "Too long," she replies. "Since her death."

He makes a noise. "Since his sister's death?"

"Yes."

He saw the gravestone on the way here. Mischa Lecter. 1974-1982. Too short of a lifetime, gone by too fast.

"Why?" Abigail asks.

"I had to keep her killer," she replies. "I had to keep him prisoner."

She blinks, as if this is an unfamiliar concept to her. It may as well be. "Why not just kill him?" she asks with all the naturalness in the world. Why not just kill him, indeed— such a simple answer for such a complicated situation.

"I'm not a killer," Chiyoh replies. "I am his prisoner more than he is my own. I am... simply taking care of the only thing binding me to this place."

Will swallows, licks his lips. "What happened?" he asks. "Why did he kill her?"

She pauses for several seconds, as if to think it over. "I don't know," she admits. "Hannibal simply came to me with him, unconscious — he was fourteen or so — saying that he had killed and eaten his sister. That he had to be kept." She swallows thickly, the noise audible. "And so I did. I obeyed, I didn't ask any more questions."

Abigail looks puzzled, her brows furrowed as she watches Chiyoh's movements. "Are you sure that *he* ate her?"

She gives her a sad smile at that, like she's asked herself the very same thing multiple times. She probably has, Will reckons. "I suppose I will never be sure."

"Well," Will starts. "We need you in Italy."

"I cannot just let him die," she replies. "He is the only person I've ever been in contact with, all this time. He is more an animal than a person, at this rate. But I cannot kill him."

Abigail bites the inside of her cheek, considering her options. "Well." She turns to Will, gives him a tiny smile. "I could do her job for her, if you'd like. Get me started on the family business and whatnot."

Chiyoh's eyes widen. "You will not just *kill* him—"

"We will make a monument out of him," Will says, as if it is the most normal thing in the world, "so Hannibal can let his sister go."

"I will shoot you if you try to kill him."

Abigail huffs. "And kill what family Hannibal has, now? Is that what you want for him?"

Will thinks about how Alana once said that Abigail has a penchant for manipulation. Maybe she was right.

Chiyoh pulls a face, walks to her shotgun, grabs it by the barrel. "I suppose not," she replies. "He is the last thing binding me to this place. I have grown here. Nearly thirty years by now, has it been? Time doesn't pass quite right here."

"Thirty one years," he replies. "It's 2013."

She hums. "I see." She shrugs, pulls away from the shotgun. "I suppose I could do with a change." A pause. "I will stay here while you do... whatever it is you will do with him and his body."

Abigail cracks a smile. "Of course," she says. "Where is he?"

"His cage is about a mile up north," she says, pointing over vaguely into the distance. "Hard to miss. You will see it."

"Sure," he replies. "Let's go, Abigail."

As soon as they're out of the tower and heading north, Will is wracked with nerves at what Abigail wants to do.

"Are you sure?" he asks. "You're under no obligation of killing him. If you'd like me to kill him, I can do that. You shouldn't be forced to confront your trauma like—"

"*Dad*," Abigail exclaims. "I want to. I need to get used to it, if I am to be your daughter. It's part of my family. At least it's, as always, *not* girls who look just like me."

Will smiles, grits his teeth before pulling her into a hug. "Never that. Never that, Abigail."

"I know," she says, because they have told her that, time and time again. "Let's just get going."

It doesn't take long for them to get there. Fifteen minutes, if that, until they see his cage, and they see the man. Will can't help but make a noise of disgust at the state he's in. He guesses that's what he gets, for being Mischa's killer. If he is her killer. If not, well— an innocent man getting fucked up by Hannibal isn't a strange occurrence. Will wonders briefly if Chilton has awoken after his unfortunate shooting, if he's in any state of mind to deal with learning that Hannibal showed himself almost directly after framing him.

He speaks a language he doesn't recognize, which he assumes is Lithuanian. He's begging— of course, he can't tell for *what*, but he can get a few guesses in.

"Would you like me to open the gate?" Will asks as he hands Abigail the knife he has with him. It's a hunting knife— it's like the one she killed Nick Boyle with.

She looks down, examines the knife. Recognition settles in her eyes and she looks back to smile at him. Her eyes glint. "Yes."

He grabs the key in the wall, heads toward the iron gate. It's rusty. The man's pleads grow louder, almost deafening.

The dim light must have made the knife not visible, because the man's pleads turn into gratitude when he starts turning the lock. He's saying the same word, over and over, and he can only guess it's a *thank you*.

He pulls the gate open, and Abigail strikes as soon as the man walks out of his cage.

His eyes widen as Abigail sinks the knife into his stomach— he's almost thin enough to see his bones, his eyes widening and bulging obscenely behind his dirty, matted hair. He lets out what he only assumes are curses, breathing hard as he scratches against Abigail's arms, too weak to do anything but let himself be gutted like a deer, Abigail's hand working up his body up to right below his sternum.

Will only watches, dark eyes interested in the scene in front of him, a smile parting his lips.

The man drops dead, a mess of blood tinting the stone floor red.

"I'm so proud of you, Abigail," Will says, leaning in to kiss her forehead. "How are you feeling?"

She hums, flexes her fingers against the blood-stained hunting knife. "Pretty good. Not much of anything, really. Just fine."

"That's great," Will says.

"I know." She looks up at him, leans in to hug him. "Any plans on what to do to the body?"

"Mm. I'm not used to doing stuff with bodies. Apart from eating them, of course. Hannibal is much more skilled in that regard. But I suppose I could try something out. To let Mischa rest, and whatnot."

Abigail hums. "What did you have in mind?"

"Well," he says. He thinks about the fireflies, those things swarming around in the night around the Castle. He likes how they look. "I was thinking about the fireflies. Maybe we could make him into one."

"That's a great idea," she says. She pauses, examines the dead body between them. She swallows audibly. "Do you really think he killed Mischa?"

"I'm not sure," he replies. Because he isn't. "But it would make a pretty good origin story for why Hannibal is the way he is, wouldn't it?"

"I suppose," Abigail replies. "Do you have one of those? An origin story?"

He thinks about it. He has no incidents, nothing that led him to be where he is now, except for a natural inclination toward violence. He has nothing to defend himself with, nothing Freudian, no excuse. "Suppose not," he replies softly.

Abigail clears her throat. "Well," she says. "We'd better start making this guy into a firefly. If he's innocent or not can come in later."

Will leans in and kisses her forehead before getting to work.

The first stop is Lithuania. Beverly's stomach is thick with nerves. Price and Zeller have come with on Jack's mission, along with Alana, who clearly had struggled a lot to have Jack let her come with. She's pretty — that's something Beverly can't help but notice. She doesn't want to latch onto the other woman in the trip, as much as she needs to do something to take her mind out of all that is happening.

"Lecter Castle is two miles up north," Jack says, driving the rented car toward the place.

What they find isn't far from what she expected. The castle itself is submerged in darkness, not a light in sight. Abandoned, so it seems. They keep their equipment in the car and head in.

It doesn't take long to find footprints that they do a deliberate effort at avoiding, to leave undisturbed. One pair is smaller than the other by a significant margin— the fact that they are probably Abigail Hobbs' gnaws at her. She had hoped she was innocent back in the Hobbs case, that she was just an unfortunate relative, the daughter of the killer and that was that. But every part points to that not being it.

The footprints lead to a cave with a cage there, swung open. That is not what they're worried about, though— the main attraction is the man hung up above it.

"Oh God," Zeller mumbles, eyes wide as he stares at him.

"I'll go get the equipment," Price says, strained as he turns around and starts walking back.

He is tied up in such a way he resembles a firefly outstretching its wings— he is covered with leaves, every part of his body except his head and about half of his stomach. His stomach is exposed just to show the wound, large and gaping... the man was gutted with a hunting knife.

"Abigail Hobbs killed him," Beverly says.

"Are you sure?" Jack asks.

She swallows. "The wound is remarkably similar to the one in Nicholas Boyle's corpse." The same day Will had stopped going to work, his body had been found. "He was killed with a hunting knife, gutted just like her first victim was."

"Her first physical victim, that is," Zeller says. "She was still complicit in her father's murders."

She gives a half-hearted shrug at that. "I don't know. I still feel weird for calling her *complicit*. Like, that was her dad. She was probably getting manipulated or something. She may as well be getting manipulated now. Hannibal seems to be good at that, if he strung along Will for so long."

Alana is still looking at the body, but she goes over to enter the cave, examine the bloodstains, the packets of food left inside, the key on the floor. "I have to agree with you there, Beverly."

"We're not here to debate Abigail Hobbs' guilt," Jack interrupts. "We are here to gauge the murder of this man."

Alana clears her throat. "He must've been kept in this cage for a while," she says. "Before he was killed. There's the key and packets of food and water, not to mention the state of his hair."

"But *why*?" Zeller asks.

She sighs. "I've no idea. We should check the footprints. Hannibal is a size eleven, right?"

"Yep," Beverly nods. "Size eleven in the US. By all means it should be him. Otherwise... no clue."

"We'll cross that bridge when we get to it," Jack says. "At least we know the other pair is Abigail Hobbs, as presented by the evidence." He turns around. "Where's Price— hey, Jimmy."

"Hi," he gasps out. "Let's get this show on the road."

What they gather from the scene is all they already suspected. What Beverly does find interesting is how there's still no prints— even though everyone knows who's the culprit, Hannibal doesn't leave prints. It's interesting, a testament to the way he's still the Ripper even if he has decided to leave that persona behind.

It's a little sickening, staring at the firefly man. She doesn't know what to think, except that this must be a much more personal kill than the others, if he's in Lecter Castle, being kept prisoner.

"I looked through some old records," Alana starts. "And it seems that the Lecters had a daughter along with a son."

Beverly swallows. "Is she the grave we walked close by? Mischa?"

"Yes." She looks at the firefly man once again. "If there's anything I would take away from this, is that this is somehow linked to her. She died young. I couldn't get any information on how, as far as I looked."

"Maybe she was killed," Jack says. "That could've been what sprung Hannibal into being what he is now."

"It's a little too clichéd, isn't it?" Zeller pipes in. "If anything, I'd guess *he* killed her, and then blamed this guy."

"And then what, he was kept prisoner here? For decades? By *who*?"

"That's another good question," Alana says. "There's still proof of someone living in the castle, though, in just one of the towers. It's one keeper."

"Hm." Beverly tilts her head. She swears she sees something up the trees— black hair, maybe — and then a gunshot airs through the cold winter air, harsh and loud.

Everyone has guns pointed in the general direction of it. But there's no one there, as far as they can see.

"Let's go," Beverly exclaims, following the general direction of the gunshot, running toward the forest. Her step is quick, as much as she nearly trips multiple times on the snow.

"Bev, I wouldn't—!" Price exclaims, but it's already too late for her to pay attention to him.

It's an intricate web of trees, their roots nearly making her trip along with the snow, keeping her eyes on the ground and on what is in front of her at the same time. She *swears* she can hear footsteps.

There are footsteps. She just can't seem to find the root of them. They're big, though. Hannibal's size. It's Hannibal. Her gun is in her pocket, she's ready to shoot if she needs to. She will see him fall and she will get the answers out of him. She will bring Will back from the dead if she fucking has to.

Her lungs are burning, the winter night air cutting through her pants. Her nose is red with the freezing temperatures. Fireflies follow her like a curious, unrepentant audience. Like they are simply watching a decadent show, ready for its grand finale.

The footsteps stop, and she nearly trips onto another tree root. She sucks in air and takes her gun out, pointing it at whoever is there, watching her, ready to attack her—

Her eyes widen. Her gun drops to the floor with a *thump* silenced by the thick layer of snow.

"*Will?*"

Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

second to last chapter! how we feeling

the ending chapter will be posted on the 15th (which is coincidentally my birthday!), as to adhere to the big bang's deadline.

enjoy!

Will, in retrospective, should've expected this.

But he's easy to adapt. That is his entire gift, the whole point of his being— he is moldable, quick to have ideas in new, strange situations, empathizing with his environment. So when Beverly follows him into the night, he acts quick, running through the snow, knowing Abigail has already long since left. He is just there, with Chiyoh's rifle, only to disrupt and make them feel on edge. That is all that was, but now that she's following him, he has to think elsewhere.

He has to stop running, first of all. He has to show her what she wants to see. Someone traumatized, someone scared, someone numb and broken. Someone who has been molded into what someone else wants of him.

Oh, yes. The Will Graham of her dreams. Her personal savior fantasy. He can only imagine how broken up she must feel about his disappearance.

He stops running and she nearly falls onto a tree root, eyes wide. He slips into this persona he fabricates in the span of those two minutes of chase— he's scared, and he's alone, and Hannibal is not here. Yes, he's been manipulated enough to go back to Hannibal even while away from him. It's grand, it's great, it's ridiculous. Of course she will fall for it, all the proof points to him being a victim. How could he be anything but that? How on Earth could he be anything but that?

"Will?"

"Beverly," he breathes out, eyes just as wide as her own.

"Will," she says again, leaning in to grab him by his shoulders. She looks over him, searching for wound marks that are not there, wound marks she will not find anywhere. "Where — are you okay? Where's Hannibal?"

"He's not here," he replies, voice distant, lacking emotion. "He can't come back here."

"Will, what are you talking about? Where's Hannibal?"

"He's not here," he insists, lip trembling. "I need to go back to him." He chokes out a fake sob, looks at her and steps back, tries to pull away. "I didn't know what else to do so I — I just did what he told me."

"No," she says, grabbing him more firmly, almost down to begging, shaking with fear in her eyes. He can sense it; he can feed off of it, that sense of despair. "No, Will, stay with me. You're safe. Jack and the rest are right here. We can help you."

"You can't help me," he replies. Tears slide down his cheeks. "Only he can."

"Will—"

She yelps when he pushes her away harshly, running off into the forest, the darkness engulfing him as he makes his way through it, a path he knows from the days he spent around it, learning the territory until it slipped onto him like a second skin. He could walk through it with his eyes closed.

"Will!" Beverly yells at the top of her lungs, desperation in every letter.

Crows reply to her call, cawing.

He's gone already, though. There's little the crows can do about that.

Beverly doesn't remember clearly stumbling out of the forest, in the state of shock and fear she's in.

What she does remember is everyone's eyes on her, how everyone was holding their breath, sucking in air, staring as she reveals herself as alive and well. They thought it was Hannibal, just like she did—they thought she'd end up dead when she walked into the forest, too drunk on the need to *catch* him to care about herself.

"Will," she breathes out.

Alana is the first one to come forward, grabbing her, letting her collapse against her. Ugly sobs sprout out of her, tears sliding down her cheeks as she clings onto her.

"What happened?" she asks, gently, not rushing her. Her heart beats against her ribcage painfully. It hurts, to think about it too long. That Will is this deep in, that Will is so deep in that he is carrying out Hannibal's orders even when he's not even *there*.

"It was Will," she sobs out.

"It was Will?" Jack echoes.

"It was," she says. "He was— scared, but also— also emotionless, he just kept saying Hannibal couldn't come back here, that he came here for him..." She sobs. She's so hysterical

she knows she will be embarrassed about it later, about baring her soul like this to her coworkers and her maybe-crush, but she can't deal with this. She can't, she can't, she can't.

"Beverly," Alana tries to soothe, fingers working through her hair, trying to calm her down fruitlessly. "Hey, breathe. It's okay. Breathe."

She tries to breathe. Tears slide down her cheeks as she breathes, counting before letting it out, counting again. Eventually her thoughts start to clear up, her eyes to dry. She swallows, clears her throat, tries not to think about what she saw in the forest too hard, otherwise she will burst into tears again.

"Bev," Zeller tries, voice soft. "Tell us what happened. What did you see?"

"Okay," she says. She sucks in a breath, counts to ten. "Okay. I followed the footsteps, right, and i saw Will with a rifle."

"Okay," Price says. She notices then that they've moved around to sit down at some steps by one of the towers— she didn't notice they had moved in the state of mind she was in. He puts a hand on her shoulder, a reaffirming gesture.

"I took out my gun, ready to— to shoot Hannibal or Abigail..." She hiccups at the memory. "But it was Will."

"How did he look?" Zeller asks. "Any injuries?"

"I couldn't see any," she replies. "Not even a scar on his head from the... the head wound or anything like that. But to be fair, it's cold, he had clearly many layers on." She swallows. "He still looked scared, though. Like a lost animal, when he saw me, like he had just seen a ghost."

"What did he say?" Alana asks. Her hand rests on her knee. It makes her warm inside out, but she refuses to think about it too much.

"He said that Hannibal wasn't here. That he couldn't come back here." She presses her sleeve against her eyes, tries to stop herself from crying again. It's starting to snow. "I asked what he was talking about and he replied he had to come back to him. That he — he didn't know what else to do, so he just did what he told him."

"Oh God," Jack says, horror in his factions.

"I tried to convince him to stay, that we would take care of him, that we would help him but —" A sob claws its way up her throat. It's ugly, choked out. "But he didn't listen. He said that... that we couldn't help him, that only he could."

Zeller makes a noise. "So he... he killed the man in the cage. Along with Abigail, of course."

"Yeah," Price agrees. "Although that doesn't make sense with the footprints."

Beverly shakes her head. "Probably wore a pair of Hannibal's shoes. I didn't look at them, but I bet that's what it was. So we would— so we would think it was him."

"Is he that far into Stockholm syndrome already?" Alana asks.

She gives her a shrug in response. "I — I guess he is. He was always... he was always unstable, and Hannibal was his psychiatrist and his boyfriend... I'm sure it wasn't that hard for him to." She lets out a shuddering breath. "To manipulate him into doing his bidding."

"Yeah," Alana agrees. She squeezes at her knee before reaching to rub circles into her back. "You need to rest. The car's ready, Beverly. We were so worried."

"I'm sure you thought I was — I was dead or dying." She lets out a little humorless laugh. "Very much alive, though. I need to sleep."

"You do," Alana replies. "Let's go." She presses a kiss to her forehead. It's not unwelcome nor unexpected, so she doesn't comment on it besides giving her a kiss on the cheek in response before going to the car. The car is, indeed, ready— it's more of a minibus, really, for everyone to be comfortable. In the back someone's put pillows and blankets, and she knows it's Alana that did it.

She gets comfortable, soothed by it, and as she falls asleep, surrounding to exhaustion, she can feel Alana's eyes on her.

Will comes back to Sweden all too proud of himself, Abigail in tow, just as happy to hear about his exploits after she left the scene. Chiyoh is with them too, of course, her rifle tucked into her briefcase. It was declared, with a firearm pass Will doesn't bother to ask what year is from or when she got it, but it must be relatively old, as she's been stuck in that godforsaken castle for years now.

The firearm pass reads she is a hunter, funnily enough. Maybe she is; she has to get food from somewhere while living as a hermit. But she's another kind of hunter, or at least she will be very soon.

"My love!" Hannibal exclaims when he sees him enter the hotel room, standing up and walking up to him before pulling him into a kiss and a hug. "I missed you so very much."

"It was only a few days, darling," he replies, kissing him on the cheek and pulling away gently.

"Can I not miss you for a few days?"

"You can, but you are still dramatic," Will teases. "I brought Chiyoh."

Hannibal turns around and he lights up when he sees her, pulling her into a tight hug.

"I missed you, Chiyoh," he says.

"I missed you as well," she says. "Your new family has pulled me into this new situation. It is strange to be away from all I've ever known, but I am sure I will grow used to it."

"You will," Hannibal says. He turns to Abigail and gives her an ever tighter hug. "How was it, dear? How was Lithuania?"

Abigail pulls away, although she's smiling from ear to ear. "I was the one to kill the man in the cave. Chiyoh didn't want to, so i—" Abigail pauses when she notices the expression in Hannibal's face. "Are you alright?"

"Yes," he breathes out. "More than alright, in fact. Thank you, dear."

"Well," Abigail says, clearing her throat. "I killed the man in the cave. From what Will said, he had a lot of fun making them think it was you."

"Oh, yes," Hannibal says. "I saw you took a pair of shoes of mine, dear boy. Was it for that?"

"You're a size larger than me," Will says, shrugging. "I thought it'd cement it in their head that it was all *you*. I wanted to keep that ruse going, and I used Chiyoh's rifle to fire to the ground just to scare them a little, but, well."

Hannibal looks at him. "But?"

"Beverly followed me," he replies.

Hannibal pulls a face. "You always said that she was your favorite of the bunch, dear. I am sorry that it came—"

"No!" he exclaims. "I didn't kill her."

"Oh!" He sounds delighted by this. "What did you do, then?"

Chiyoh clears her throat. "If you'll excuse me, I must get settled in my own room."

"That's okay, Chiyoh," Hannibal says, waving her a goodbye as he looks at Will intently. "What did you do?"

"I ran through the forest— I knew the grounds well, I had been going through them for a few days— until I stopped. I played this, uh, this whole victim thing, talking about how you weren't here and how the FBI couldn't help me, only you could, before running off."

Hannibal pulls him into a deep kiss. "Even in my wildest imaginations did I ever picture you with this incredible penchant for manipulation, darling."

Abigail clears her throat. "Are you two going to screw? You're my parents, I'd like to *leave* before you do that."

Will whips his head around and flushes deep red. "We didn't plan on doing that. Sorry for forgetting you were there, Abigail, you can leave if you want to."

She sticks her tongue out at them and leans in to give each a kiss on the cheek before leaving.

"I love you," Hannibal says as soon as she leaves. "I love you so very much. We should start leaving for Italy."

"We should," Will agrees. "I love you too. Maybe in two days we could leave... I'd like to enjoy Stockholm for a bit longer."

Hannibal lets out a breathless little laugh at that. "Enjoy Stockholm as much as you wish, dear."

Will rolls his eyes. The city's syndrome is what he's being catalogued as, anyway. "I will."

"If it wasn't Hannibal in Lithuania, then they must be on their way to one of the places Dr. Du Maurier suggested," Alana starts as they return the minibus to the rent-a-car service they got it from.

"What do you think is the correct guess?" Beverly asks.

She's still exhausted, she won't deny that—the heaviness of seeing Will like that still plays at her whenever she closes her eyes. She's tried to learn to live with it by promising herself that she'd find him, alive and well, that she'd take him and help him recover. She may be too focused on *saving* Will rather than getting Hannibal behind bars, but whatever works is whatever works.

Jack hums. "I believe the logical one would be Italy," he replies. "If he has an emotional connection to it, he'd go to it despite the aesthetic attraction of France."

"I agree," Alana says. "Other people at the FBI have been checking out his stuff, too, and there's a lot of... ornate silverware, pretty things. Most of them are imported from Italy. I think it's most likely where he's at."

"*Where*, though?" Price asks. "There's plenty of places in Italy. Plenty of cities."

Alana turns to him and she sighs. "Florence is my guess. When I was studying psychiatry and he was my mentor he talked to me about how he moved there with his uncle Robertus after his parents' death. That that is where he *became a man*, so to speak. I think it's the fairest guess we can throw."

"Then that's where we're headed, isn't it?" Zeller pipes in.

Jack pulls a face. "Yes. Yes it is."

There's an unspoken part about how if any of them came across Hannibal, he would be shot on sight. How, as much as it's important for him to be alive to be imprisoned, no one would particularly mind if he died, bullet wounds ripping apart his internal organs. Beverly wouldn't mind, especially— she's been practicing her aim like hell. It's not that she'd mind, no— she'd *love* for Hannibal to be ripped apart by bullets, laying dead like Hobbs did what feels like millennia ago.

"Let's get going, then," Zeller says after a few beats of silence. "Let's get those plane tickets goin'. We're not going on those godforsaken trains, they look hellish."

Alana clears her throat, and a small smile works its way onto her lips. "I've heard they're quite nice, actually."

Beverly reaches over to hold her hand, squeeze before pulling away.

It feels like such a miniscule thing— it may look like such a minuscule thing— but having Alana at her side means the world to her. She's not as filled with righteous anger and a wish for Old Testament punishment, but she *understands* in a way no one else seems to. She calls her parents and they are more worried than anything else. Very few people understand what it's like to have a friend fall into this pit of suffering Will is in.

She just has to help him dig his way out. She has to, whether that be by saving him, knight in shining armor to the castle, or shooting the dragon dead.

She promised herself she would do that, about two weeks ago, and she is determined to take care of that promise, whatever it takes.

The trip to Italy is long and in one of those pricey train rides, with nice food and nice beds and nice everything. It is a few hours over a day in train, plus three hours of transfer. Will has never been in a train before, used to those long car rides and a nice plane trip every once in a while. Abigail shares the same experience.

"Reminds me a lot of the buses my dad used," she says as they get settled for lunch. "Whenever I tried out a new college we would get into the bus and try and find a girl that looked just like me. He would just— point with his head at her." She huffs. "I was the bait."

Chiyoh looks mildly horrified, but she doesn't comment.

Hannibal offers her a smile. "Our experiences shape us as people, Abigail. If it wasn't for your father, you wouldn't be here with us today."

"I suppose not," she says. "I'm glad to be here with you." She looks around, like she's checking for anyone watching them, before she continues. "About our experiences shaping us... I'm sorry about your sister, Hannibal."

He tenses up a little, looks down at his food. "Well, thank you."

Chiyoh clears her throat. "I suppose I can finally ask you what really happened to her, no, Hannibal?"

Will whips his head around just to look at Hannibal's expression when she says that. He looks even more tense, biting his lip as he considers his options.

After a long few seconds of silence, he starts, "I suppose you are all aware that it would give me no advantages to lie about this, yes?"

"I mean, yeah," Abigail says before popping a piece of veal into her mouth. She chews and swallows before saying, "We all know you're a cannibalistic serial killer. You murdering your sister wouldn't be like, a huge shock."

"I did not kill her," he replies, looking away.

"Then?" Will presses, putting a hand on the small of his back, an attempt at a comforting gesture.

Hannibal swallows. "I ate her," he admits. "The man in the cave killed her, and I did not know how to parse the grief inside me — we were very close, I practically acted as her guardian after our parents' passing, so I..."

"Shh." Will leans in to kiss him. There's tears pricking at his eyes. "It's okay. That's enough explaining. You don't need to explain any more."

"I do believe that is enough," Chiyoh agrees. "I apologize for prying, Hannibal, but I have wondered about that since you left Lecter Castle."

"It's quite alright," Hannibal replies. "I understand the curiosity, especially with your awareness of my true nature."

Abigail reaches his hand out and holds Hannibal's, squeezing.

"I understand why you were curious too, Abigail," he says. "I love you."

"I love you too, dad."

"You remind me of her," he says, leaning in to kiss her forehead. "But I hope I never have to see you go. It would break my heart."

"It would break my heart as well, Abigail," Will says. "We love you very much."

"I know," she says. "I know."

"I got a brand new identity," Hannibal says late at night as he sheds his plastic suit. "Roman Fell. He was going to work here in Florence, but he's from France, so I doubt anyone knows him by face. We should be fine."

Will smiles and leans in to kiss him. "That's great. What about the rest of us?"

"Abigail will be his adopted daughter— Alexandra Fell— and you will be his partner, although we can't be married, I'm afraid. Civil union. You're his American partner, Blake Carter, as to excuse your lack of knowledge of Italian."

"That's great. Also works for my bit of knowledge in French, as I'm Southern and whatnot. What's our backstory?"

"Oh, I met you on a trip while I was still studying the classics," he replies. "You were a barista, down on your luck, and I decided to help you out."

Will snorts. "You're giving us the sugar daddy backstory?"

He laughs and leans in to kiss him. "I couldn't resist, my dear."

"Of course you couldn't. Well, we're moving into a much bigger place soon, I imagine?"

"Yes, we are. The place is incredible, I am sure you and Abigail will love it. Chiyoh will stay around, but won't live with us. She's quite used to living alone; I am sure having roommates all of a sudden would prove to be a very stressful situation for her."

"I imagine so," Will replies. "Well, we're here, at least. I am so glad."

"We are here, indeed." Hannibal kisses him again, again and again. "Although, the obvious reasons as to why I may be in Florence does leave us having to be a lot more careful. I do not want to move away from here, not any time soon, so we need to consider our resources."

Will swallows. "I don't care about any of them," he says. "Except Katz, perhaps. I would like for her to live, if worse came to worse."

He smiles. "I imagined you would like for her to live. I will tell Chiyoh to be careful."

"She can shoot any of them, but leave Katz alone." He clears his throat. "If she's to be maimed, I want... I want to do it. I want to tear the veil from her eyes. I want her to *see* me."

Hannibal's smile only widens at that, and he pulls him into a kiss. "We all want to be seen, dear boy. Just be careful when you tear the scales off her eyes."

"I will be," he replies. "I want her to... to live to tell the tale. To tell everyone that I am a monster. Or perhaps she will fall into denial and claim I've been even further manipulated by you than previously anticipated."

"One can't manipulate that manic glint in your eyes when you maim someone, though, dear," he says. "No one can manipulate words of victory out of you, manipulate your story of killing and eating people out of you."

"No one can," he replies. "I love you. I am so glad I'm here with you. Otherwise... I would've been stuck in Wolf Trap, lonely and miserable, forever. Only the thrill of the kill keeping me company."

"Jack will always regret the fact he thought we would make a good match."

"Well, he was right, wasn't he?"

They both laugh, and Will leans into his lover's warm embrace.

He loves Florence already.

Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

There is a certain hope that they'll lose sight of them. At least that's what Will hopes— that Katz and the rest will lose sight of where they are and they won't have to come in contact with them, killing and maiming them in the process. As much as he holds little emotional connection to the whole of them, he still *knows* them. He's never known someone he's killed before, always complete strangers or faces he saw in the news. He's not sure how killing someone he knows would affect him.

But it's a reality he may have to live with, so he deals with it. The best outcome would be for Katz to find him alone, leaving him only with needing to maim her, not hurt anyone else as he tells her exactly what he is. What he's always been, as much as no one saw it. As much as he hid himself for years upon years, only Freddie Lounds seeing glimpses of it behind his mask, that worn old thing he's thrown away now. Even then, when Freddie finds out she was right all along about him, it'll be far too late for anyone to do anything about it.

Hannibal meets a man at a bar, who reminds him of himself quite a bit. His name is Antony, and he's quite the handsome thing, all smiles and tilts of his head as he follows Hannibal to have dinner with him.

"Mr. Fell," he greets. "My name's Antony Dimmond. It's a pleasure to meet you."

Will shakes his hand. "It's a pleasure to meet you, too." He shows him off to Abigail. "This is our adopted daughter, Alexandra."

"Oh," Antony exclaims. He offers her a hand and she shakes it as well, smiling at him politely. "What a pleasure. I didn't know Mr. Fell had a daughter, this is very good news. Is she American just like you are?"

"Yes, I am," Abigail replies. "Thank you. You seem like a wonderful guest for my father to share his dinners with. Come in, make yourself at home."

When Abigail goes off to the kitchen to get a few things, stuff goes down south for Antony Dimmond.

As Will eats the oysters Hannibal laid out— a little joke, as Hannibal had told him about how oysters tend to make people taste better from what he's tried— he says, "My partner is very particular about how I taste."

Hannibal chuckles quietly, while Antony's eyes widen, his pupils dilate.

He looks at them, then looks at the kitchen, like he's waiting for Abigail to return. But she's still in the kitchen.

"Is it— is it *that* kind of party?" he asks, almost stumbling between words, flustered.

"Because I—"

A hint of jealousy strikes Hannibal's factions, because he immediately frowns and grips at the kitchen knife he was holding. "It is not that kind of party," he replies.

"Oh," Antony says. "I apologize. That was probably rude of me, then."

"Mm," Will says. "I did kind of bait you into it, didn't I, Mr. Dimmond?" He looks up at Hannibal, grins at him, all teeth. "Come on, darling."

"What—"

Before he can say anything else, Hannibal sticks the knife into his head. The way his eyes widen and he splutters is beautiful; Will watches with a certain degree of fascination, smiling at Hannibal lovingly as Antony's eyes look around, unable to move, the strike's precision noteworthy.

There's little he can do now, really, except wait for someone to pull the knife out so he bleeds to death.

Abigail comes back with a casserole full of more oysters, and nearly drops it when she sees the state their guest is in. But then she just smiles, leaving it on the dining table and sitting down to eat.

"Who's going to do the honors?" she asks as she takes an oyster and eats its contents eagerly. "Do I have to? I don't really want to stare at a half-dead man while I eat." She puts the oyster in the pile of discarded, eaten ones.

"If you'd like to do it, you can do it," Hannibal replies.

She smiles. "Cool. Okay, then." She stands up and takes the knife's handle into her hand, feeling it, before pulling it off. Antony gasps and his eyes roll back as blood spurts out of his skull and onto the floor, covering Will's sleeve because of their proximity. He doesn't particularly mind, watching him as he dies.

"Technically," Will jokes. "You killed him."

Abigail laughs, vibrant, as she sits back down to eat, cracking another oyster open. "Add that to my kill count. It's ever growing with you two."

Nick Boyle, the man in the cave, Antony Dimmond. He wonders who else will be added as time goes on.

Beverly lands in Florence with the rest of the team, and she can't help but be nervous. She watches every corner, expecting to see Will there, looking as haunted as he did when she saw him in that Lithuanian forest. She's a wreck, really, only Alana's kisses and her hands on her hips managing to calm her down. All she wants is to relax, to catch that bastard of Hannibal, but she doubts that will happen anytime soon. He seems to be really good at what he does.

She can certainly *try*, though. She can try and try until that son of a bitch gets behind bars. She knows well that everyone else is trying just as hard, if not more, to catch him. Especially Jack— Jack has been a disaster ever since this started. He holds up fine, always bedrock, always keeping himself as stable as possible so he looks fine, but she knows he's not fine. She knows him well enough, and everyone else knows him well enough. Alana tries to coax him into talking, into making conversation, into some sort of comfort. He doesn't quite budge, though.

Florence is beautiful, that she can give the city. In another world she'd be here in vacation with Alana, talking about the weather and the beauty of the city, anything but what's really happening here, as she goes to the farmer's market, tries to get any hints as to where they may be in specific.

It's not a gigantic city, but it's big enough. There's three hundred thousand people here. Finding Hannibal may take forever.

Time drags on slowly, the weeks pass as they go from place to place, trying to get any hint as to where Hannibal may be. She sees them in the corners of her eyes, fuzzy afterimages of both of them, somewhere in there, talking, Will looking scared, bruises along his arms. He looked fine physically when she saw him in the forest, but it was very dark. There must be bruises along his body telling of a story he may not live to tell.

She'll make sure he will live. She'll make sure Hannibal doesn't get rid of him.

She watches the river that goes along the city, how Jack looks at his wedding ring in his hand. Bella had went into remission, but she was still too feeble to follow him to Italy. It was just phone calls and that hope that she would be fine, that the remission— spontaneous as it was — wouldn't turn on them, wouldn't make the cancer come back.

There's news of a crime scene at a local cathedral, a beautiful thing, and Beverly's heart clenches painfully on her chest with every step she takes toward it. Is this it? Will she see Will's body there, mocked for everyone to see? What horrible thing will she see there, what has become of her friend?

What is there isn't Will. At least, she can't confirm immediately that it's Will, but it doesn't seem to be the case. It's a human torso, warped and moved around in a manner that can't be defined as anything other than *grotesque*. It's warped in such a way that, if she squints, she can see it as a heart. Not one of those, with the two matching halves— no, an anatomical one, with its valves and its pieces.

She's a little nauseous.

Price walks toward the scene and he looks at Zeller. "Do you— do you think it's him?" he asks, in a strained whisper.

"I hope not," he says. "But— but we have Will's data, so we can just... just test it somewhere, right, and..."

"Yeah," Beverly agrees. She keeps looking at it, at this human heart. It was Hannibal, there's no doubt about it. She doesn't quite understand it, though— why a heart? Is it to show his love, to someone, to something? A heart doesn't make sense. Of all the things she expected for Hannibal to hang up here, his heart wasn't it. It's full and beating, pumping with energy, with love.

She stares at it for a long time. Her mouth is dry with disgust.

When she turns around, Jack is talking with an Italian man. He introduces him as Inspector Ronaldo Pazzi, who has been involved with a case he thinks may have involved Hannibal in the past.

She sighs. Hannibal, Hannibal, Hannibal— that name will haunt her for far too long, it seems. She can't wait until he's in jail.

"Have you seen them around?" Abigail asks, popping a piece of meat into her mouth.

Hannibal hums and shakes his head. "I haven't had the pleasure. They should get an idea of where I may be when they hear about the lectures on Dante, though. To be fair to them, it *is* a very easy guess as to where I may be. They just may not expect me to be the lecturer."

Will laughs softly. "I've seen a bit of Jack along one of the bigger grocery stores; immediately ducked until he went away. Didn't want him to see me that early on, you know? If anyone is going to see me it's going to be Beverly."

Abigail hums. "I've thought about letting Alana see me if the opportunity arises. She wasn't as close to me as you, dad, obviously, but she still was quite attached to me and to her idea of me being an innocent child. It must break her up quite a bit to see me like this." She huffs, rolls her eyes. "A *willing accomplice*, and whatnot."

"Yeah," Will agrees. "They must be all quite stressed. It's grand. I'm really happy to be in the situation we're in. Of course, after I stab Beverly we'll have to go somewhere else, won't we? Can't stay in Italy after they know we live here."

"Sure," Hannibal agrees. "I was thinking about Argentina." He turns to Chiyoh. "I'm sure you'll get a grip on the language easily. You've always been good with them."

Chiyoh, who had been silently eating, looks up. "Oh, yes. I've always had ease with learning languages. It may come easy to me. I assume your husband and daughter don't know Spanish either?"

There's something incredibly warming about being called Hannibal's husband. Will can't help but smile at it.

"I know a little bit of Spanish," Abigail says. "From second language classes in school and everything. I'm nowhere near fluent, though." She turns. "What about you, dad?"

"Uh." He laughs softly. "I don't know any Spanish, honestly. All the second language classes I took in school were for French and I was already familiar with it because, you know, Louisiana — but that was a while ago, so it wouldn't help any way. I can try and learn, though."

"I believe you will do great," Hannibal says. He leans in and kisses Will's cheek. "So Argentina it is, after our time in Florence is over with. I can't wait to be there with you all. My family."

Chiyoh smiles at him.

The days pass like that, until Will finally has a chance at seeing Beverly while she's alone.

It's a little worrying, to be there, waiting to check if there's anyone else with her. The few times he's seen her she's usually with Alana— he assumes there is something going on between them, but of course it's not like he can go and ask her. He has a plan, there, a plan that *should* work if Beverly has swallowed every lie and every pantomime he's given her.

He sees her at the grocery store, as she's looking at the dessert aisle. He swallows, falls onto that little concept of being helpless, of being scared. He is anything but.

"Beverly?" he tries, quietly.

She turns toward him and her eyes widen, immediately wrapping him into a hug. He responds awkwardly, flinching a little, but he knows that's what she expects. She pulls away afterward, looking at him with guilt in her eyes.

"Will," she breathes. "Oh my God, Will. You're alive. How are you? Let me take you to—"

"Hannibal is in the other aisle," he says. "If he sees me talking to you he'll..." He swallows, clenches his jaw. "He'll be upset. Please, could we meet tonight? At the... at the cathedral where he left his heart. Outside of it."

Beverly looks at him and she shakes her head. "Will, no, you'll be fine. You don't have to go back to him, you know that."

"Will?" Hannibal calls out.

He pales and looks at Beverly apologetically, his eyes wide with pretend fear. "At midnight, okay?" he whispers. "I'll see you then. I promise."

"Okay," she whispers. "Be careful. Be careful, Will."

"I'm coming!" Will calls back, rushing out of Beverly's sight.

He knows she must be following them, watching them, trying to gauge where they're going, so Hannibal plays at an abductor; he grabs him by his shoulder, strings him along to the self-checkout, goes through the motions as Will fiddles and squirms next to him.

"Where are we going next?" he asks in a small voice.

Hannibal smiles at him, tilts his head so Beverly can see him grin. "Oh, we're going home, of course. Don't worry, dear."

Will nods. "Okay," he says softly.

It's only a matter of time, of the ticking of the hours, before he can give Beverly all the answers she wants.

They get out of the grocery store, and of course, Beverly may still be following them, so they work through crevices and crowds until she has lost them. Will leans in to kiss Hannibal as soon as they get into their home.

"Start packing your bags, everyone," Will says, leaning over to peck Abigail on the cheek. "I'll have to go by midnight, and we'll be going to Spain by uh, two in the morning, I'd bet? And after Spain we'll head toward Argentina."

Chiyoh looks up at him, having been watching the television roll the news— she hasn't used a television in years, he guesses, so that's fair. "What are you going to do tonight, Will?" she asks carefully.

He smiles. "I will stab my dear friend Beverly. I'm pretty sure she will come alone to our meeting, but if you'd like to keep Hannibal's husband safe and sound, then you can come with and incapacitate anyone else that's with her."

She hums. "I don't see why not. After I finish packing I will follow you into the night."

He splits off into a grin. "Good." He turns to Abigail. "What about you, Abigail? Any interest on participating?"

"Oh, not really," she says. "I got for Alana to see me while at the farmer's market, so that's about all that I wanted to do in regards to the team."

"Okay." Will steps away from her and leans in to kiss Hannibal on the lips; he responds eagerly to the touch, smiling against him. "So that would be it, then. We'll be leaving Florence."

"We are," Hannibal agrees. "I will miss it. But if our time here is over, then our time here is over." He squeezes at Will's forearm comfortingly. "I would go anywhere for you, Will. To the end of the world."

Abigail fake gags next to them, and they all laugh.

Beverly isn't dumb, so she tells Price and Zeller where she's going. She doesn't tell Alana, though, too worried about what her reaction will be— how she most likely will insist to go with her. But she has to see Will alone; she has to protect him from Hannibal alone. It's irrational, she knows, but she feels the need to save him before anyone else can. Jack also goes unnotified. If she doesn't come back after an hour, well, Price and Zeller know what must've happened to her, and they'll do the necessary when that happens.

She needs to save him; she needs to take him back from the man who caught him, who captured him. She keeps thinking back to the way he whispered to her, urgent and terrified, his eyes wide. The way he shook as Hannibal touched him. It's disgusting. As she walks toward the cathedral, she can only feel bile rise up her throat. She can't wait to see him, to fix this. To fix all of this.

She gets there just in time, as the clock ticks into midnight, stepping into the shadows of the cathedral. There's no one around, but the lights are still turned on, dim lighting making the details of the church visible. She guesses it's for any homeless people who want to go and sleep there, to not go in completely blind. She wouldn't know.

She's pulled out of her thoughts by a voice that's so unlike what she's heard their last two interactions it takes several seconds for her to recognize it.

"Beverly."

It's Will, but he's much hardened. Lacking in emotion. She whips around to see him, take him in. He's wearing an overcoat and a scarf, his hair brushed. He looks like someone else.

"Will," she says. There's something wrong. She doesn't know why, but the sensation of something being wrong is strong and *there*. It may be his tone. But Will has always been weird— maybe he just slipped out of emotion during this entire situation. It's fine. "Are you alone? Is... where's Hannibal? We're going to get you to a safe place, okay, you'll be fine."

"Hannibal's at home," he says. He tilts his head. "I'm fascinated at just how well I've managed to mask myself, really. Freddie Lounds will have a field day when she hears about this. She's been painting me as a victim, taking back everything she ever said about me after I got *kidnapped*... but now?" He laughs. It's lacking in any humor. "Now she'll know she was right."

Beverly blinks. There's something deeply wrong. What is Will talking about? "Will? What— what are you talking about?"

His eyes glint. There is nothing there but curiosity. He steps closer to her. "In your defense, and in defense of everyone else— I worked very hard to blind you all." He reaches out, cups her cheek in his hand.

"Will, what the hell are you talking about?" she asks, again, shaking ever so slightly.

"This."

She doesn't register the flash of the blade as he takes it out of his pocket until it digs into her stomach. She cries out, doubles over against him.

"Do you understand?" he breathes. "We fooled you all. It was all a *farce*. Hannibal never kidnapped me." She's in so much pain she can barely register his words; her ears ring. She breathes out shakily, clings onto him as blood drips down onto the cement, her knees weakening as he guts her, blade working through her entrails. "A lot of the missing persons

cases in the states around Virginia— they were all me, Beverly. Allison Bracero and Mason DeVore and Beverly Boswell... the list goes on."

"Will," she cries out. Her world is shattering around her.

"I knew what Hannibal was from my first bite of his food." His hand keeps at her back, holding her up as he disembowels her. "I ate them too. I understood him. We understand each other like no one else ever will. Now— now, we're together, with Abigail in tow. There is so very little you can do to stop us. You never held much of a chance."

He pulls the knife out, and Beverly cries out, falling onto a pool of her own blood, back against the cathedral. Her eyes are wide, and she's losing blood fast. "N-No," she breathes out.

"I know you're going to tell them all what happened," he says. "But don't follow us. I don't want to have to kill you. You were the only one in that place I ever respected. Don't be brave, Beverly. Let yourself heal from this."

Tears slide down her cheeks. This is a bad dream, a nightmare, something her mind would conjure up just to upset her. But it's real; she couldn't ever imagine the way blood trickles out of her stomach, the way she drifts out of unconsciousness, closer and closer to the edge.

"Do you want me to call Zeller for you?" he asks. His smile is blinding white, all smug. He couldn't fake this, she knows that; there's no way to explain this off as Stockholm syndrome. What she's seeing here is Will's truth, as incredibly ugly as it is. "I imagine it must be quite hard to get a hold of a phone with all that blood." He kneels next to her and takes her phone from her pocket. "Password?"

"4321," she breathes out. She's dizzy. She can't believe this is happening, bleeding out right outside that cathedral, Will brandishing the knife.

Will nods and swipes through her phone and into her contacts, hitting Zeller's phone number. He answers after only one ring; to make matters worse, he puts speaker on.

"Bev?" Zeller breathes out. "Bev, what happened? Are you at the cathedral? Are you okay?"

"Yeah, she's here," Will says casually. "She's bleeding. I'd recommend calling an ambulance if I were you."

"Will?" The surprise in his voice hurts her. "Will, what the fuck, is Hannibal—"

"It was me, Brian," he says. He sounds almost bored. "It was all me. She'll explain when she's not on the brink of bleeding out." He hums. "I have to go now. Take good care of her, will you? Make sure Alana doesn't work herself into a heart attack when she hears about this."

"You son of a bitch—"

Will hangs up, and puts the phone right where he found it.

"Will..."

He nods. "Yeah. I'll get going, now. Survive, Beverly. Just for me— just for your beloved. You deserve a happy ending with Alana."

Beverly grips at her wound, her palm turning red against the blood, and watches as he leaves the scene of the crime, her heart in pieces as she passes out.

When she wakes up, she's at the hospital, and she has all sorts of fluids hooked up to her.

She breathes hard, looks at the fluorescent lights, tries to make sense of all that's happening. She nearly doesn't recall what happened, but after a few seconds it all comes rushing back—the blood, the way Will held her, the way Will spoke to her. He almost sounded like he pitied her. Bile rises up her throat and she coughs, turning to her side to see Alana sleep on the seat next to her hospital bed.

"Alana," she breathes.

After a few seconds and a few more tries, Alana opens her eyes. She's immediately fuzzing over her.

"Beverly," she says. "Beverly. How are you feeling?"

She smiles weakly. Her head hurts. "I've certainly been better," she replies. "I... um... what did Zeller tell you?"

"That Will had called from your phone, but that was it. That you'd explain."

She doesn't want to explain. It feels rotten, to let everyone else know what happened, that all their worries have been for a fairytale, something fabricated until there's nothing but lies left. It's an ugly story, with an uglier truth. She doesn't know how to spin it into something that will make everyone happy.

At the same time, she doesn't think she can subsist on these lies anymore, after seeing the truth.

"I'll explain when..." She swallows. "I'll explain when everyone's here to hear it."

"Beverly," Alana says, desperately. "I just... I need to know. I can hear everything else afterward but, did— did Will stab you?" Her eyes are shining with tears. It breaks Beverly's heart.

"Yeah," she replies. "Hannibal wasn't there." She tries not to break down, right then and there, but her eyes burn. "I'm sorry, Alana. We were searching for— for a lie."

Alana nods, swallows thickly, tears sliding down her cheeks. "I'm— I'm going to go to the bathroom," she says.

They both know what she's off to do, but neither of them say anything about it. Beverly watches her leave and lets her own tears fall. She knows what she saw, as much as she wishes she could somehow warp it into something that fit the version of events she had in her head

until then. She wishes everything would be solved, she wishes she could just say Hannibal's manipulations ran so deep he convinced Will he had killed people before him.

But she knows that's not it. And she knows she has to come to terms with the reality given to her.

The rest of it goes in bits and pieces in her brain, not remembering most of it. She goes through recovery, and she explains everything to Alana, Jack, Price and Zeller. They all seem so close to breaking down, and she understands, really. It's horrible, but there's no option but onward.

She can only think of what Will told her. *Don't be brave, Beverly.*

She shouldn't be brave. She hopes Alana will agree; that they should leave the investigation, have the happy ending these two murderers want for them. Close the chapter, close the damn book, burn the entire library down. They deserve this much, maybe, after this trauma and this scar that kind of looks like a smile in the right light.

When she gets back to the United States, she explains to Alana.

"I'm quitting," she says. "I... I don't want to keep looking for them. I want to be safe. I want to forget this ever happened."

Alana leans in, takes her hand on her own. "I understand," she says. "If you want to get away from all this, we'll get away from all this. I can't... I couldn't put it against you. We'll find our way out."

She leans in and kisses her softly. "Okay. Thank you. I was worried you — you wouldn't understand."

"I do understand," she says. "I get it." She kisses her again and again. "Go talk to Jack, okay? I'm sure he will be understanding."

She does go talk to Jack. It's quiet, and kind of sad, but he holds no rancor for her decision or tries to get her to change her mind. All he offers her is a quick hug, a thank you, and a wish for her to be happy wherever she decides to go.

Afterward, she and Alana move out of Baltimore and out west, through the Midwest, until they finally find themselves comfortable in Arizona. They go over there so it's as far away as possible from all of it, from the suffering and the lies and the history they are trying to put past them. Alana finds a job as a psychiatrist in the city they settle down in, and Beverly decides to stay at home for the time being, doing some freelance work with programming as she prepares herself for going back to work somewhere, in-between therapy sessions and checkups on her wound.

She tries not to check the news. She doesn't check the web about crime news, resists the urge to type *TattleCrime* into Google. She's not going to pay attention to Will and Hannibal anymore. For her own health, she has to avoid it like the plague.

They arrive in Argentina on a nonstop trip about sixteen hours after Will leaves the scene. They go on a train to Madrid and then get a flight to Argentina, the very same fake identities working just fine for them. They land and get a hotel room, before starting to seriously consider their options.

"We're done with all that," Will says, curled up in bed next to Hannibal. "We're out of the FBI's sight."

"That we are," Hannibal says, running a hand through his hair. "I didn't think it'd be so quick. But here we are." A pause. "How did it feel to stab your friend?"

Will swallows. "Strange," he says. "I'm not used to stabbing people I care about. But I know she's alive. I don't have your same... medical knowledge and surgical precision, but I tried to make sure it wasn't too deep."

Hannibal leans in and kisses the top of his head. "I'm sure you did. She will be fine. Let's just hope that she listened to your advice and that as soon as she's recovered she leaves the investigation of our crimes."

"That's the hope," he says. "I also quite enjoyed Alana, so I'd be very sad to kill either of them."

"I agree with that. I knew Alana for a long, long time, as you are aware, so I wouldn't wish for her death. She is a very strong woman."

"That she is."

The days pass slowly like that. Abigail gets accepted into a college in Argentina as an international student, which excuses all her troubles with the language—which she picks up with incredible ease, anyhow. Will also doesn't struggle much with it, while Chiyoh gets some classes with a private tutor to refine her skills.

They get a house away from Buenos Aires, in the outskirts, and become comfortable there. It becomes the same routine of always, then; the hunt, the kill, the food. Abigail is always happy to join them.

"I love our little family," Abigail says, smiling before she pops a piece of meat into her mouth. "You included, of course, Chiyoh."

Chiyoh smiles at her. "Of course. I must admit, I love living with you all as well, much more than I thought I would at the start of all this. I missed... contact, I suppose. Isolation did a number on me."

Hannibal leans in and rubs her forearm comfortingly. "Now you have people, Chiyoh. You have all the interaction in the world."

She nods. "Of course."

The articles are interesting; TattleCrime's reviews on the news are scathing as Freddie Lounds digs deep on what Beverly told the press. She swallows every word she typed about how she

was sorry about Will Graham's situation, saying how she had always been right about him. Will guesses she was, but it's not like she *knew*— she simply was throwing darts at a board, hoping to get the most amount of clicks with every outlandish claim. Those outlandish claims just happened to hit all the buttons of truth there were.

"Dad!" Abigail comes home from college with a dog following her lead. "Could we keep him?"

Hannibal looks over and he pulls a face, just a modicum. "Abigail, I don't—"

Will leaps in joy and immediately goes over to take the dog in his arms. "Yeah," he says. "Yeah, we can keep him."

Hannibal sighs, but doesn't protest any more.

Will loves Argentina, and everything that comes with it.

Chapter End Notes

wow, we're done! it's finished! i am so proud of this fic, and i hope you all enjoyed the ending. i may write followup stories to this, as i have many thoughts about where everyone ends up and what may happen after. not sure yet, though.

as you can see, this fic is part of a big bang challenge, and after various issues i still don't have an artist. you can do various types of art, not necessarily a drawing -- if you'd be interested in filling that position, *please* check out the [villainous big bang](#) dreamwidth for the rules, minimums, and etc.

please leave a comment or such with your thoughts, and follow my [writing tumblr](#)!

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!